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Sobecki, Sebastian

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The Handwriting of Fifteenth-Century Privy Seal and Council Clerks

Sebastian Sobceki 

ABSTRACT

Although most scholars of medieval English palaeography are familiar with the hand of the Privy Seal clerk and poet Thomas Hoccleve, almost nothing is known about the handwriting of his fellow clerks. This article is the first attempt to identify and describe the hands of a number of clerks who wrote for the Privy Seal and for the Council in the fifteenth century. In Part 1, I identify the handwriting of Hoccleve's fellow clerks, including William Alberton, Henry Benet, John Claydon, John Hethe, John Offord, and Richard Priour, adding writs, letters, charters, and manuscripts in their hands. I also identify the hand of the Council clerk Richard Caudray and attribute further records to the Council and Privy Seal clerk Robert Frye. Part 2 offers a reconsideration of the features of Hoccleve's handwriting in the light of the new findings. This article also identifies the scribal stints and hands in four documents produced by Privy Seal clerks: British Library, MS Add. 24,062 (Hoccleve's Formulary); BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii (Part 1 of the Book of the Council); BL, MS Harley 219; and Edinburgh University Library, MS 183 (Privy Seal and Signet formulary, or 'Royal Letter Book'). This article reveals the extent to which Privy Seal clerks participated in the copying of literature and offers a more nuanced understanding of the varieties of the secretary script used by government scribes.

During the second half of Edward III's reign, the office of the Privy Seal, which had served the monarch's personal communication, became increasingly involved in general government and inter-office communication.¹ The Privy Seal evolved into a clearing-house for government business with a wide remit, covering such diverse tasks as conducting foreign correspondence and issuing warrants for the Great Seal.²

I would like to thank Daniel Wakelin and the readers for the *Review of English Studies* for the scrutiny with which they examined this essay. My gratitude also extends to Misty Schieberle, Lawrence Warner, and David Watt for commenting on earlier drafts, and to Gwilym Dodd and Euan Roger for their ready help. Manuscripts with digitized images are indicated by (*); the links are listed at the end of the article.

- 1 A. L. Brown, *The Governance of Late Medieval England 1272–1461* (London, 1989), 43–60. See also T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1920–1933), 5.
- 2 Brown, *Governance*, 43–60. A helpful overview of these offices is contained in Linda Clark, 'Officials of Central Government', in Linda Clark (ed.), *The History of Parliament. The Commons 1422–1461*, 7 vols (Cambridge, 2020), 1. 418–46. Because the Privy Seal Office generated many outgoing documents, the records are scattered in British and foreign archives. Many relevant documents are grouped in the National Archives (henceforth: TNA) in classes PSO 1 and C 81. Useful finding aids are available at TNA, in two

The clerkship of the Council usually fell to a seasoned Privy Seal clerk or one of the king's personal secretaries, who received support from other clerks, staffed mostly from the Privy Seal. The duties of the clerk of the Council were to register attendance and minute the meetings of the Council, which was made up of the sovereign's closest advisors.³

With the Privy Seal ceasing to function as the king's private seal, a third seal began to assume this role. This seal was initially called the 'secret' seal, but towards the end of Edward III's reign, the keeper of this seal was styled the king's secretary, and the seal itself became known as the Signet.⁴ Unlike the other writing offices, such as Chancery or Privy Seal, which were based in Westminster, the Signet Office was headquartered in Windsor Castle, although its clerks were mobile, constantly accompanying the king and his secretary.⁵ In the fifteenth century, the Signet Office was supported by the office of the French secretary, sometimes designated in records as 'Secretary of the French Tongue', which emerged under Henry VI.⁶ Initially their tasks, derived from the broad administrative remit of French government clerks, were to liaise between England and France and to assist in the administration of England's French possessions.⁷ But in the 1430s, the formal office of the king's French secretary, also called 'the secretary of France', was born.⁸ Its function was to conduct diplomatic correspondence in French on behalf of the king of England and his queen consort.

Each writing office of medieval England's central government developed its distinctive script, and four often closely cooperating groups of clerks—those of the Privy Seal, the Council, the Signet, and the king's French secretaries—came to rely on a cursive script imported from France in the second half of the fourteenth century that is called 'secretary' in English but elsewhere referred to as 'cursiva' or 'cursiva recentior'.⁹ The Chancery, however, was by far the largest of the writing offices and

typescript volumes: *Public Record Office Guide*, 1998, and *Expanded Introductory Paper Notes to The National Archives*.

- 3 A. L. Brown, *The Early History of the Clerkship of the Council* (Glasgow, 1969). Council records are in TNA classes C 81 and C 82, though an important collection is contained in two manuscripts in the British Library, MSS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii and iv. These have been printed by Harris Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England 3–4* (London, 1834–1835).
- 4 Brown, *Governance*, 47.
- 5 On the Signet Office, see J. Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary and the Signet Office in the XV Century* (Cambridge, 1939). Signet letters are preserved in TNA classes PSO 1 and C 81. Individual signet missives are also kept in classes SC 1, E 101, and E 28. Many have survived in foreign archives, especially in France. See also *Calendar of Signet Letters of Henry IV and Henry V (1399–1422)*, ed. J. L. Kirby (London, 1978), and, for a summary of signet missives, C. T. Allmand, *Henry V* (New Haven, CT, 1992), 362–5, and Theron Westervelt, 'Warrants under the Signet in the Reign of Edward IV', *Historical Research*, 83 (2009), 602–16.
- 6 On this office, see Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 89–105.
- 7 Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 89–93. Some of their records are available in TNA class C 81, though numerous letters are held in French archives.
- 8 Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 93–100.
- 9 Albert Derolez, *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books: From the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2003), 142–62 (for secretary, 160–2). The more calligraphic versions of this script, termed by continental palaeographers *cursiva libraria*, *cursiva formata*, and *bastarda*, were used in charters and as book hands (142–62). See also M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250–1500* (Oxford, 1969), xix–xxii, and Jane Roberts, *Guide to Scripts Used in English Writings up to 1500* (London, 2005), 211–3. The terminology for classifying scripts remains complex and contested, but the main insular forms of *cursiva*—*bastard secretary* and *secretary*—correspond to the Latin names '*cursiva formata*' and

continued to use bespoke forms of *anglicana* instead of secretary.¹⁰ Although secretary predominated in most of the writing offices of the central government and subsequently became widely used as a book hand in fifteenth-century manuscripts, it has received little sustained attention. The last time the secretary family of scripts was discussed in depth was more than 100 years ago, in 1915, by Charles Johnson and Hilary Jenkinson.¹¹ By contrast, the varieties of *anglicana*—so named by N. R. Ker and defined by M. B. Parkes—have become a focus for much palaeographic activity, especially among scholars of Middle English manuscripts.¹²

On its most basic level, *cursiva*—of which the English secretary is a variant—is an angular script that can be fairly quickly written. Its basic forms are simpler than those of *anglicana*. The shared features of *cursiva* include a single-compartment **a** [C1, C12] and **g** [C32–7];¹³ **b**, **h**, **k**, and **l** with looped ascenders on the right-hand side [C2, C4, C5–7, C38–41]; and **f** and long-**s** extending below the baseline [C3, C8–9, C27–8]. English secretary is more angular than Continental *cursiva* and usually features modern-**r** [C62–3] and often simple forms of **w**, written as a double-**v** [Derolez C82–3]. In English book hand variants of secretary, also called ‘bastard secretary’ (*cursiva formata*), complex forms of **w** [CA34–6], borrowed from *anglicana*, sometimes appear. With time, some secretary variants absorbed still more *anglicana* letterforms, including the round or reverse-**e** [CA17]; long-**r** [CA22]; and kidney-shaped **s** [CA30]. However, the appearance of two-compartment **a** [CA1] and **g** [NT55–6, NT59] usually suggests a mixed script rather than secretary with *anglicana* features.

Because much Privy Seal correspondence was directed at foreign powers, and therefore overwhelmingly in French,¹⁴ the clerks in this office perfected a legible yet quickly executable secretary script. The main hallmark of the privy seal secretary script is its condensed module, suitable for often small strips of parchment, and the

‘*cursiva*’, respectively. T. J. Brown refers to regular secretary as ‘*cursiva media*’ and identifies more cursive forms of the script as ‘*cursiva currens*’ (Roberts, *Guide to Scripts*, 211). However, Parkes points out in his review of Roberts’ book that using ‘*cursiva*’ to explain ‘secretary’ is reductive (M. B. Parkes, review of Jane Roberts, *Guide to Scripts Used in English Writings up to 1500* (London, 2005), in *Speculum*, 84 (2009), 1,105–6 (1,106)). I treat the handwriting and the secretary scripts of Signet clerks and French secretaries in a separate essay in ‘The Handwriting of Fifteenth-Century Signet Clerks and the King’s French Secretaries’, in Margaret Connolly, Holly James-Maddox, and Derek Pearsall (eds), *Scribal Cultures in Late Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Linne R. Mooney* (York, 2021), in press.

- 10 On the late medieval Chancery, see *The Men of Court 1440 to 1550: A Prosopography of the Inns of Court and Chancery and the Courts of Law*, ed. J. H. Baker, 2 vols (London, 2012); Malcolm Richardson, *The Medieval Chancery under Henry V* (London, 1999); Jane E. Sayers, ‘The English Royal Chancery: Structure and Productions’, in José Marques (ed.), *Diplomatique royale du Moyen Âge XIIIe-XIVe siècles* (Porto, 1996), 77–114; and Bertie Wilkinson, *The Chancery under Edward III* (Manchester, 1929).
- 11 *English Court Hand AD 1066 to 1500*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1915).
- 12 For a definition of *anglicana* and its book hand varieties, *anglicana formata* and *bastard anglicana*, see Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands*, xiv–xviii and xxii–xxiv.
- 13 References to individual letterforms, where available, are to Derolez, *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books* by abbreviated chapter title (‘C’ for ‘*Cursiva*’, ‘NT’ for ‘*Northern Textualis*’, ‘CA’ for ‘*Cursiva Antiquior*’) followed by the numbered letterform.
- 14 Gwilym Dodd examines the use of French in ‘Trilingualism in the Medieval English Bureaucracy: The Use—and Disuse—of Languages in the Fifteenth-Century Privy Seal Office’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), 253–83.

use of a few standardized graphs, especially for letters common in English: this includes the complex **w** [Derolez CA 34, 36] and, in its informal cursive grades, a round-**w**, which resembles a circle with a **B** or **2** lodged inside it [Fig. 4], and **y** with a tail that moves up through the x-height [Fig. 4, right, 'denying(e)']. In addition, the choice of **g** usually depended on the language of the document. In contrast to a number of other government types of the secretary script, the variety used by the office of the Privy Seal generally features an upright aspect, with the shafts of **f** and long-**s** written an angle between 80° and 88°. The writing angle of these two letters emerges as a distinguishing factor that can be quantified and measured irrespective of image scaling. More importantly, the preferred writing angle, certainly for government secretary scribes, remains consistent across time, script grade, and type of document.¹⁵ This script remained fairly stable during the first half of the fifteenth century. Because Council clerks under Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V were appointed from the Privy Seal—this includes John Prophet and Robert Frye—Council minutes and related documents continued to be modelled on the Privy Seal's secretary script until the appointment in 1421 of Richard Caudray, the king's secretary.¹⁶

Despite the celebrity status that Thomas Hoccleve's handwriting enjoys among palaeographers, no progress has been made in identifying the hands of his colleagues in the Privy Seal Office (henceforth: PSO).¹⁷ Such an inquiry would certainly be of value, not least because it would delineate his hand more sharply, especially against those of his immediate peers. An obvious hurdle for any such endeavour has been the perceived lack of documents that can be securely attributed to any of Hoccleve's fellow clerks. Documents were either not signed at all or, in the case of signed records, such signatures could not be taken as evidence of physical authorship. Despite these hurdles, historians of diplomatic—first and foremost Pierre Chaplais—have occasionally commented on the hands of government clerks, but this group of scholars has tended to take an interest primarily in the content and purpose of documents.¹⁸ The identification of individual hands was at best a side effect of such work. Government offices and their development have been the focus of constitutional and institutional historians, again with only little attention paid to clerks'

15 All measurements have been made from the baseline of the letterforms (0°) using a Gima orthopaedic goniometer (model 27340).

16 On Frye: L. S. Woodger, 'Robert Frye II (d.1435)', in J. S. Roskell, L. Clark, and C. Rawcliffe (eds), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421*. 4 vols (Stroud, 1993), 3, 143–5, and A. L. Brown, 'The Privy Seal Clerks in the Early Fifteenth Century', in D. A. Bullough and R. L. Storey (eds), *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in Honor of Kathleen Major* (Oxford, 1971), 260–81; for Caudray: Shannon McSheffrey, 'Richard Caudray (c.1390–1458): Fifteenth-Century Churchman, Academic, and Ruthless Politician', *Medieval Prosopography*, 33 (2018), 167–79; and for Prophet: Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks'.

17 Some of the attributions in John H. Fisher, Malcolm Richardson, and Jane L. Fisher, *An Anthology of Chancery English* (Knoxville, TN, 1984) could be considered here, but as Michael Benskin has shown ('Chancery Standard', in *New Perspectives on English Historical Linguistics* (2004), 1–40), Fisher et al. offer no palaeographic methodology, conflate secretary and anglicana hands as 'chancery', and consistently confuse privy seal and signet records.

18 Pierre Chaplais, *English Royal Documents: King John – Henry VI, 1199–1461* (Oxford, 1971); *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice: Part I–II*, 3 vols (London, 1975 and 1982) (henceforth *EMDP I–II*); and *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003).

handwriting.¹⁹ The present article emerged from a close examination of the writing produced by government clerks and royal secretaries for itinerant English chanceries in France during the Hundred Years' War. Henry V's campaigns and Henry VI's administrative network on the Continent have left behind government records, personal letters, and treaty documents, many of which were signed by clerks who would not have done so in England. By taking into account British and continental accounts, rolls, and archives alongside signed writing in different grades and for different purposes, the specific conditions of Lancastrian France make it possible to identify the hands of Council clerks and Hoccleve's colleagues in the PSO.

I. THE HANDS OF INDIVIDUAL CLERKS

John Hethe

In Hoccleve's petitionary *Balade to Somer*, written between 1408 and 1410, the poet invokes the names of three fellow Privy Seal clerks: 'We, your seruantes, Hoccleue & Baillay, | Hethe & Offorde, yow beseeche & preye'.²⁰ The three clerks are John Bailey, John Hethe, and John Offord, and I have elsewhere shown that Hoccleve's ties to Bailey were personal, not least because in his will of November 1420 Bailey bequeaths gifts and land to Hoccleve and his wife, thereby triggering the creative process that, as I have argued, resulted in the *Series*.²¹ It has so far not been possible to identify Bailey's hand, but multiple documents written by John Hethe and John Offord have survived.

Between 1422 and 1427, the PSO was divided into two sections, one remaining stationary in Westminster, the other being mobile in France.²² But this division only formalized an existing de facto split of the PSO, from as early as 1417, that had allowed England's war machine to operate smoothly on the Continent.²³ Hethe and Offord were allocated to the France-based half of the PSO: on 5 February 1420, 'John Offorde and John Hethe, clerks of the privy seal office, who are said to be with the king in Normandy on his service', were permitted victual their ship bound for France.²⁴ A writ of 2 May 1420 confirms that Hethe and Offord were staying with Henry V in Normandy.²⁵ There are also letters of attorney prepared on 8 January of that year for one John Offord in connection with joining the campaign in France.²⁶

In France, English clerks often adopted the custom of French chanceries by systematically signing their missives. Presumably this was partly the case because they operated in a context that relied primarily on French-language correspondence and,

19 A. L. Brown's work remains indispensable: 'The Privy Seal in the Early Fifteenth Century', PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1955; *The Early History of the Clerkship of the Council*; 'Privy Seal Clerks'; and *Governance*. Tout's six-volume *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England* remains foundational.

20 Hoccleve's *Works: The Minor Works*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall and others, EETS ES 61, 73, 2 vols (Oxford, 1970), 2. 60, ll. 25–6.

21 *Last Words: The Public Self and the Social Author in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2019), 65–100.

22 Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262.

23 Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 265.

24 *Calendar of the Close Rolls, Henry V: Vol. 2, 1419–1422* (London, 1932), 72.

25 Chaplais, *EMDP I*, 2. 636, n. 331.

26 TNA C 76/102, m. 5, found on <<https://www.medievalsoldier.org>> accessed 18 February 2020.

hence, on local scribes who tended to sign their documents. Another reason for signing their work may have been the dynamic contexts in which they found themselves: changing commanders, shifting work locations, and unusual assignments. To remain recognizable in such a setting, adding one's signature to a missive was an expedient gesture. All this was compounded by the frequent reassignment of clerks from one office to another, particularly because England's military campaigns required clerks to move with armies to support their various communication needs.²⁷ During such campaigns, military forces were often sub-divided, and the various contingents needed to communicate with each other as well as with England and the English chancery in Rouen. This is why many of the writs, warrants, and letters produced there are dated at a siege or 'before' certain locations. Of course, a clerk's signature does not always mean that the document was written by the same clerk. Signatures were often endorsements by overseeing clerks.²⁸ But I am confident about the authenticity of the hands under discussion because of the range and type of documents that feature the clerks' involvement.

A. L. Brown considers Hethe active in the PSO before 1398 and beyond 1422, making him therefore Hoccleve's exact contemporary, though little else is known about him.²⁹ He wrote a privy seal warrant in French, dated at Rouen, 19 December 1419,³⁰ and there are two signed English documents, a writ and a warrant, both dated before Melun, 8 October 1420.³¹ These records have been calendared and printed.³² In each instance, the letterforms in his signature match those in the text above them. All three documents reveal a consistent privy seal secretary hand, characterized by an upright aspect with regular spacing. Across all extant documents, even in his charter hand, which is not more upright than his letter hand, Hethe sets the shafts of **f** and long-**s** at an angle of 80°. In the neat bastard secretary he employs in the Treaty of Troyes (Paris, Archives nationales, AE III 254*), he uses formalized majuscules. Hethe's **g** resembles Hoccleve's form in almost every detail. As with Hoccleve, Hethe employs a flat-topped **g** with various tails [C32, C34], but with a broader range, including tails turning left (TNA C 81/1365/24, line 3, 'greet') or, in fact, with the same coat hanger hook characteristic of Hoccleve's hand (TNA C 81/1365/24, line 4, 'tarynge'; Treaty of Troyes, passim, 'Regi' and 'Regni'). When executing **g** in French texts, Hethe adopts the lettre courante habit of writing a short hooked backward-curling tail [C35].³³

27 Hethe was seconded to the Signet Office in France: Malcolm Richardson, 'Hoccleve in His Social Context', *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1986), 313–22, 318. There are letters signed by Hethe in collections of signet documents, such as TNA C 81/1365/24 and C 81/1543/21.

28 Elizabeth Danbury offers the most recent discussion in 'The Study of Illuminated Charters, Past, Present and Future: Some Thoughts from England', in Gabriele Bartz and Markus Gneiss (eds), *Illuminierte Urkunden: Beiträge aus Diplomatie, Kunstgeschichte und Digital Humanities* (Cologne, Vienna, and Weimar, 2018), 259–80 (270–4). See also Dodd, 'Trilingualism', 265–6.

29 On Hethe, see Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262, 267, 268; Richardson, 'Hoccleve', 318; J. A. Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve* (Aldershot, 1994), 3, 7, 9, 11; and Sobecki, *Last Words*, 67, 78, 96–9, 160–1.

30 TNA C 81/667/910; Chaplais, *EMDP I*, 2. 636.

31 TNA C 81/1365/24 and C 81/1543/21, respectively.

32 *Calendar of Signet Letters*, ed. Kirby, 184. The letters are printed in Fisher, Richardson, and Fisher, *An Anthology of Chancery English*, 131–2.

33 TNA C 81/667/910, line 1, 'Dengleterre'.

But Hethe also wrote out two important treaty exemplars: a treaty of friendship between Henry V and Philip the Good (given at Rouen, 25 December 1419) and, more importantly, the copy of the Treaty of Troyes prepared for Charles VI and presumably presented to him on or around 21 May 1420.³⁴ Although both documents bear the signature of Richard Sturgeon, clerk of the crown in Chancery and the overseeing clerk, under the turn-up the signature 'J. Hethe' appears in both records, confirming the authenticity of his handwriting in these two charters and, hence, in the other records written in the same hand.³⁵ These two charters have the significant benefit of being thus far the only two identified highest-grade documents to have been written by a regular Privy Seal clerk, although we know that other Privy Seal clerks were from time to time tasked with executing, copying, or transcribing important records and treaties.³⁶ The bastard privy seal secretary of the Treaty of Troyes and the Anglo-Burgundian treaty show not only Hethe's outstanding penmanship, but they are some of the finest surviving instances of this script. Despite the elevated grade, **f** and long-**s** are written at Hethe's usual angle of 80° in both documents. He was an accomplished scribe who executed some of the most prestigious and lucrative assignments: on 22 February 1422, he received 66s. for having acquired 66 quires of calf skins to write a bible for Henry V, presumably in his charter hand.³⁷

John Offord

Among the hands of Hoccleve's colleagues whom I have identified, John Offord's handwriting comes closest to the standard grade privy seal secretary hand of the poet, whereas at the informal grade Richard Priour offers the best parallel to Hoccleve. This is particularly revealing because Offord appears to be referenced as 'offord' in the margin on f. 49r in the sole holograph manuscript of most of the *Series*, Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. iii. 9. Thus, there may very well have been a personal link between Offord and Hoccleve beyond the *Balade to Somer*.³⁸

Offord's life is less enigmatic than that of Hethe. Offord was the illegitimate son of Laurence de Pabenhham of Cambridgeshire, whose mother was Alice de Ufford.³⁹ He probably used his more prestigious paternal grandmother's name because he was

34 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Moreau 1425, no. 92, and Paris, Archives nationales, AE III 254*, accessed 3 May 2020. For complete transcriptions, see Chaplais, *EMDP I*, 2. 547–9, 629–36.

35 Chaplais, *EMDP I*, 2. 549, 636.

36 See, for instance, Chaplais, *EMDP I*, 2. 716 (items 342–3).

37 Frederick Devon (ed.), *Issues of the Exchequer* (London, 1837), 372. Henry died later that year, but if this bible was ever produced and has survived, then it may be possible to identify it, knowing Hethe's impressive bastard secretary hand.

38 On this marginal entry, see J. A. Burrow and A. I. Doyle (eds), *Thomas Hoccleve: A Facsimile of the Autograph Verse Manuscripts*, EETS SS 19 (Oxford, 2002), xxxi; H. K. S. Killick, 'Thomas Hoccleve as Poet and Clerk', PhD thesis, University of York, 2010, 180; David Watt, *The Making of Thomas Hoccleve's Series* (Liverpool, 2013), 58; Rory G. Critten, *Author, Scribe, and Book in Late Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), 63–5; and Sobceki, *Last Words*, 67, 96–8.

39 He may not have been the son of Laurence Pabenhham of Offord in Bedfordshire as was proposed by Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 181, but instead was probably the illegitimate grandson of Alice de Ufford, as argued by Douglas Richardson, *Royal Ancestry*, 5 vols (Salt Lake City, UT, 2013), 4. 29. On Offord, see J. H. Kern, 'Der Schreiber Offorde', *Anglia*, 1916 (1916), 374; Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 180–1; Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262, 267, 274; Richardson, 'Hoccleve', 318–19, 321; Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve*, 7, 12; and Sobceki, *Last Words*, 67, 77–8, 96–9, 120.

related to John Offord, the mid-fourteenth-century keeper of the Privy Seal. The clerk Offord started his career at the Signet before moving to the Privy Seal. In 1409, he received a grant of two shops in London, and in November 1410 he surrendered a pension payable by the abbey of Reading to his underclerk John Auncell.⁴⁰ As stated above, Offord was in France, with Hethe, between 1417 and 1422. Most of the documents written and signed by him date from this period.

On 6 June 1420, Offord sent a letter from the siege of Sens to an unidentified 'Worshipful Maistir' in England.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the original letter no longer survives, but it was once contained in the now severely damaged BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, so this missive must be counted among the victims of the fire in Ashburnham House of 1731, in which parts of the Cotton Library were damaged.⁴² Thomas Rymer's *Foedera*, assembled before the fire, contains the text of the letter, which Offord ends with the following greetings to his Westminster friends:

Comande me to Abel Hoet, and Bayly, and to Sir J. Brokholes, and to grete weel Richard Priour (whom the fayr Town of Vernon on Seene Gretith Weel also) and Will. Albtoo Lark, and all the Meyne, and Kyng Barbour and hys Wyf.⁴³

Most of the persons named are Privy Seal clerks: 'Abel Hoet' is Abel Hessill; 'Will. Albtoo' is William Alberton, 'Bayly' must be John Bailey, and Richard Priour was also a Privy Seal clerk. John Brokholes was a Chancery clerk, while 'Lark' and 'Kyng Barbour and hys Wyf' remain enigmatic.

A number of French, Latin, and English privy seal documents written out by Offord in 1422 have survived, two of which are dated at Paris and one before Meaux.⁴⁴ All three records show a neat angular privy seal secretary hand with characteristic engrossed majuscules in the opening line, hooked **g** [Fig. 1, line 2, 'grace'], and a very upright duct of 87°. On 27 August 1422, only four days before the death of Henry V, whom Offord accompanied, the clerk signed an English warrant under the Privy Seal at Bois de Vincennes.⁴⁵ As is the case with other Privy Seal clerks at the time, his English hand is less formal, preferring a coat hanger **g** [a variant of C32–4 and C37 with a bigger tail, as in Archives nationales, AE III 254*] over the typical secretary form reserved for French and Latin documents.

There has also survived a short personal letter from a 'J.O.' to Robert Frye, and the features, including **f** and long-**s** set at 87°, strongly suggest that it was written by Offord. The letter is preserved in a cache containing Frye's correspondence.⁴⁶ The brief letter is written in a note-taking cursive variety of privy seal secretary, but other

40 Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 181.

41 Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*, ed. by George Holmes, 3rd edn (The Hague, 1740), 4iii–i, 177.

42 On the losses in the Caligula shelfmark and D v. in particular, see Andrew Prescott, "'Their Present Miserable State of Cremation': The Restoration of the Cotton Library", in C. J. Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy* (London, 1997), Appendix 2.

43 Rymer, *Foedera*, 4iii–i, 177. On this letter: Kern, 'Der Schreiber Offorde', 374; Günter Hagel, *Thomas Hoccleve: Leben und Werk eines Schriftstellers im England des Spätmittelalters* (Frankfurt, 1984), 31.

44 TNA C 81/669/1183 (French, 15 April, before Meaux) [Fig. 1, bottom], C 81/669/1192 (French, 6 June, at Paris), and C 81/669/1193 (Latin, 12 June, at Paris).

45 TNA C 81/1544/1, olim C 81/669/1204. For a printed version: Eugène Déprez, *Études de diplomatique anglaise: de l'avènement d'Édouard 1^{er} à celui de Henri VII (1272–1485). Le sceau privé, le sceau secret, le signet* (Paris, 1908), 37–8.

46 TNA E 28/29/53, printed in Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 274.

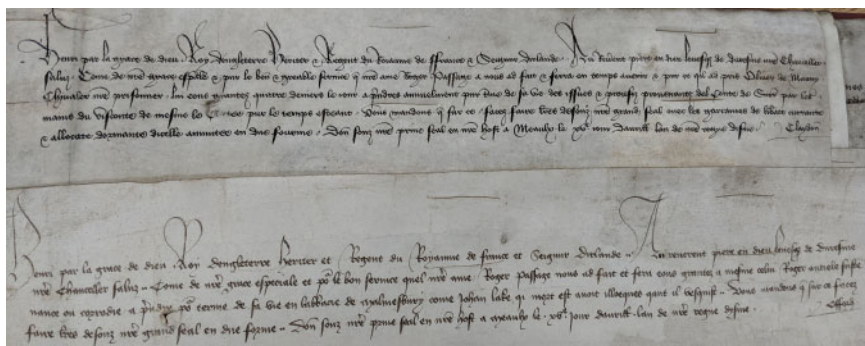


Fig. 1. Two privy seal warrants for the great seal, dated before Meaux, 15 April 1422. Top: TNA C 81/669/1184, signed by John Claydon; bottom: TNA C 81/669/1183, in the hand of John Offord. © The National Archives. These records are licensed under the Open Government Licence 3.0.

than the similarity in the hand and the 'J.O.' signature, this document cannot be listed as Offord's with absolute certainty. Offord died shortly before 19 October 1442, when the fellow Privy Seal clerk Henry Benet was granted Offord's annuity from the Exchequer.⁴⁷

Offord can now also be identified as the scribe of the French *Secretum Secretorum* in BL, MS Harley 219. In her ground-breaking revelation that Harley 219 contains Hoccleve's hand, Misty Schieberle locates the poet's stints, excluding from this list the *Secretum*, entitled in this manuscript *Le liure du gouvernement des Roys et des Princes*.⁴⁸ Specifically, she notes the extraordinary execution of this highest grade secretary script by the scribe of the *Secretum*: "When compared to Hoccleve's most "formal and constrained" English handwriting in the Trinity Gower . . . the *Secretum Secretorum* is still significantly more neat, upright, angular, and formal".⁴⁹

A direct comparison between the French *Secretum* in BL, MS Harley 219 and Offord's hand in the French and Latin letters from 1422 reveals remarkable parallels that span aspect, duct, letterforms, and flourishes. The angle of **f** and long-**s** is exactly 87° and hence consistent with that used in all his letters. Offord's characteristic engrossing **R**, which he employs in the first line of his letters, appears in identical detail in 'Roy', the seventh word in line 1 of the privy seal warrant dated 15 April 1422 at Paris [Fig. 1, bottom image] and in 'Roiaume', line 1 on f. 83r of the *Secretum* [Fig. 2]. The exaggerated then-fashionable heart-shaped ascender, with the left lobe not touching the stem of the ascender, is shared by both texts, as is, rather unusually, the base of this luxurious **R**, which resembles a single-compartment uppercase Secretary **A** with a head elongated to the left. By contrast, Hoccleve's execution of the same graph is clearly different (see, for instance, the confirmation of a grant, dated 1 August 1420, line 1).⁵⁰ The upright duct in the Harley 219 *Secretum* is

47 Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 181.

48 Misty Schieberle, 'A New Hoccleve Literary Manuscript: The Trilingual Miscellany in London, British Library, MS Harley 219', *The Review of English Studies*, 70 (2019), 799–822.

49 Schieberle, 'A New Hoccleve Literary Manuscript', 811.

50 TNA C 81/667/948.

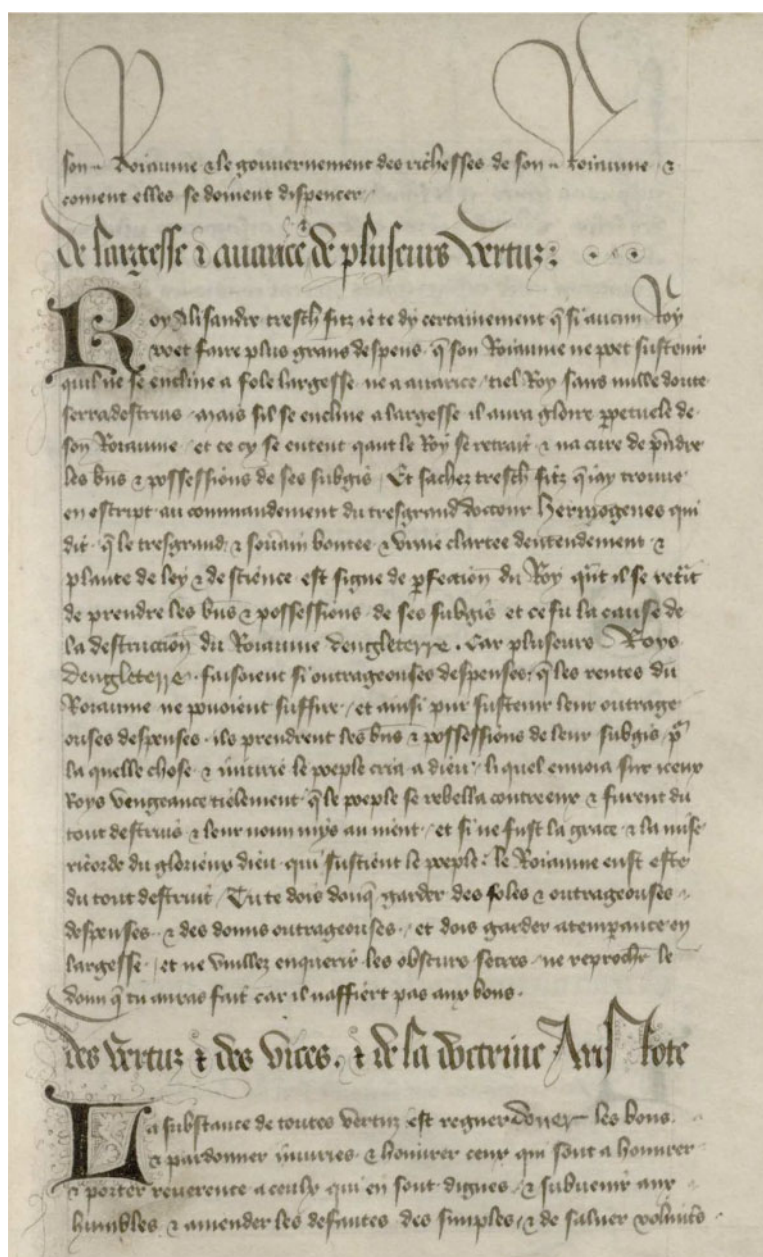


Fig. 2. The French *Secretum Secretorum*, in the hand of John Offord © The British Library Board (MS Harley 219, f. 83r).

Offord's, and his characteristic letterforms for writing in French are used throughout both texts: examples include **g** with an angular top and often hooked descender, curling to the left ('grand', last line in Fig. 1, bottom; 'largesse', line 6 in Fig. 2); dotted **y** with a right-curling tail ('Roy', line 1, Fig. 1, bottom; 'ley' and 'Roy', line 12, Fig. 2);

or **h** with a closed lobe that connects with the leg and a tail that curls or hooks to the right ('host', final line, Fig. 1, bottom; 'humbles', final line, Fig. 2). For the *Secretum* Offord uses a higher grade than for the French letters; the careful execution and delicate hairlines bespeak a charter-grade secretary befitting a book or treaty hand, but the letterforms and duct are essentially the same across these two instances of Offord's hand.

The Hands in BL, MS Harley 219

Although the *Secretum* in Harley 219 is written entirely in Offord's hand, Hoccleve does add corrections,⁵¹ which strongly suggests here as elsewhere that this manuscript was indeed overseen by Hoccleve. My assessment is that all of the fifteenth-century hands in Harley 219 are privy seal hands. There are probably six such hands in the manuscript (ignoring the later two hands in the flyleaves):

- A. Hoccleve (Hand 1): ff. 1–8v, 43v, 47v, 49r, 51v–54v, 57r–62v (up to line 10, 'erat'), 106r–151v (certainly up to line 13, right column).
- B. Hand 2 writes ff. 9r–37r. This scribe appears to imitate Hoccleve, using a consistent flat coat hanger **g** and an **h** with a limb below the baseline [C38]. Perhaps this is Hoccleve's underclerk, John Welde, given the close shadowing of the poet's hand. The angle of **f** and long-**s** is not consistent, but does not usually rise above 84°.
- C. Hand 3, 37v–43r, 44r–47r, 48r–48v, 49v–51r, 55r–56v, 62v (from line 10, 'tunc')–71r. This hand shows some similarities in aspect and letterforms to John Hethe but the angle of **f** and long-**s** at 85° is too upright for his hand.
- D. Hand 4 produces ff. 72r–79v. This hand resembles Robert Frye's, and is set at his characteristic almost vertical angle of 88°. The Privy Seal and Signet formulary associated with him, Edinburgh University Library, MS 183*, offers a good comparison with his hand on f. 39r, which is signed with his trademark **F**. The calligraphic hooked descender on **g** is typical for his writing, as is the tall **A** and the Greek-alpha-shaped looped tails in final lines (Edinburgh UL, MS 183*, f. 39r and Harley 219, f. 74v). Chaplais identifies the tails as Frye's most distinctive feature, printing a number of examples.⁵² However, the more common **A** form in Harley 219 with the left-pointing top ('At', l. 3) does not appear anywhere in Frye's handwriting.
- E. Offord (Hand 5), ff. 80r–105v.
- F. Hand 6 writes the list of French officers employed by the Crown, 152v–153r. This hand is also modelled on a privy seal secretary script, though of the generation active into and beyond the 1440s. The hooked tail of **g**, for instance, is common in the slightly younger group of clerks I am discussing below.

Offord's copy of the French *Secretum* and the presence in Harley 219 of further privy seal hands is important because these stints show that in addition to Hoccleve

51 On some of these, notably 'Dengleterre', twice on f. 83r, see Schieberle, 'A New Hoccleve Literary Manuscript', 812.

52 Chaplais, *EMDP II*, 16. Plates 38b and 41–3 are also in his hand.

other Privy Seal clerks participated in the dissemination of literature, making this collection a collaborative PSO literary miscellany, in all likelihood produced under Hoccleve's supervision.

The identification of Offord's hand in BL, MS Harley 219 does not provide conclusive evidence to narrow down Schieberle's dating from c.1401 to Hoccleve's death in 1426, though it is perhaps possible to refine this date range.⁵³ Because the passages from the *Gesta Romanorum* in Harley 219 have been used in the *Series*, Harley 219 most probably antedates the composition of the *Series*, which can be dated to late November 1420 to Spring 1421 on the basis of John Bailey's will.⁵⁴ Offord left for France in February 1420 and did not return to England until late 1422, following Henry V's death. It is therefore unlikely that this manuscript was compiled after Offord's departure in February 1420. The *Secretrum*, occupying its own quire and being written in an altogether more elegant hand, could have been added by Offord at a different date. But because Hoccleve's hand in this manuscript closely resembles his handwriting in later years and because the passages from the *Gesta* aided Hoccleve in the composition of the *Series*, I think a date closer to the composition of the *Series*, probably before Offord's departure for France in 1420, is likely.

Richard Priour

In Harley 219, at the end of Hoccleve's last stint, the hand that completes the glossary by writing a series of additions on f. 151v, starting at line 14 in the right column, shows a number of small departures from the previous folios. This hand resembles Hoccleve's, and although it could be a hastier execution of the poet's handwriting, it points to the Privy Seal clerk Robert Priour. His round-w and the aspect of his informal hand are virtually indistinguishable from Hoccleve's. The two shapes of g, with left-curling and z-shaped tail, that are found on f. 151v ('aged', l. 5 from the bottom; 'lowage', penultimate line) also appear in Priour's badly damaged letter in BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 55r [Fig. 3] ('myghte', l. 13 from the bottom; 'god', l. 12 from the bottom).⁵⁵ In final position the ascender on d continues its loop through the stem of the letter, protruding slightly: Harley 219, f. 151v 'aged', l. 5 from the bottom, and 'old', l. 4 from the bottom; BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 55r [Fig. 3] 'and', l. 18 from the bottom, and 'god', l. 12 from the bottom. The writing angle of f and long-s is 85°, found in Priour's letter, though it is not typical for Hoccleve.

The Next Generation: William Alberton, Henry Benet, and John Claydon

Whereas Hethe and Hoccleve first appear in the 1380s and 1390s and either die or cease to produce documents in the 1420s, the records for William Alberton, Henry Benet, and John Claydon begin only in the first two decades of the fifteenth century and continue beyond the 1440s.⁵⁶ Offord, who died in 1442, appears to belong to a

53 Schieberle, 'A New Hoccleve Literary Manuscript', 813.

54 Sobceki, *Last Words*, 65–100.

55 The letter is addressed to Robert Frye and dated at Rouen, 10 March [1419]. An eighteenth-century transcript in BL, MS Add. 38,525, ff. 74–5, is the only complete copy.

56 See Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262, n. 2; Janice Gordon-Kelter, 'The Lay Presence: Chancery and Privy Seal Personnel in the Bureaucracy of Henry VI', *Medieval Prosopography*, 10 (1989), 53–74.

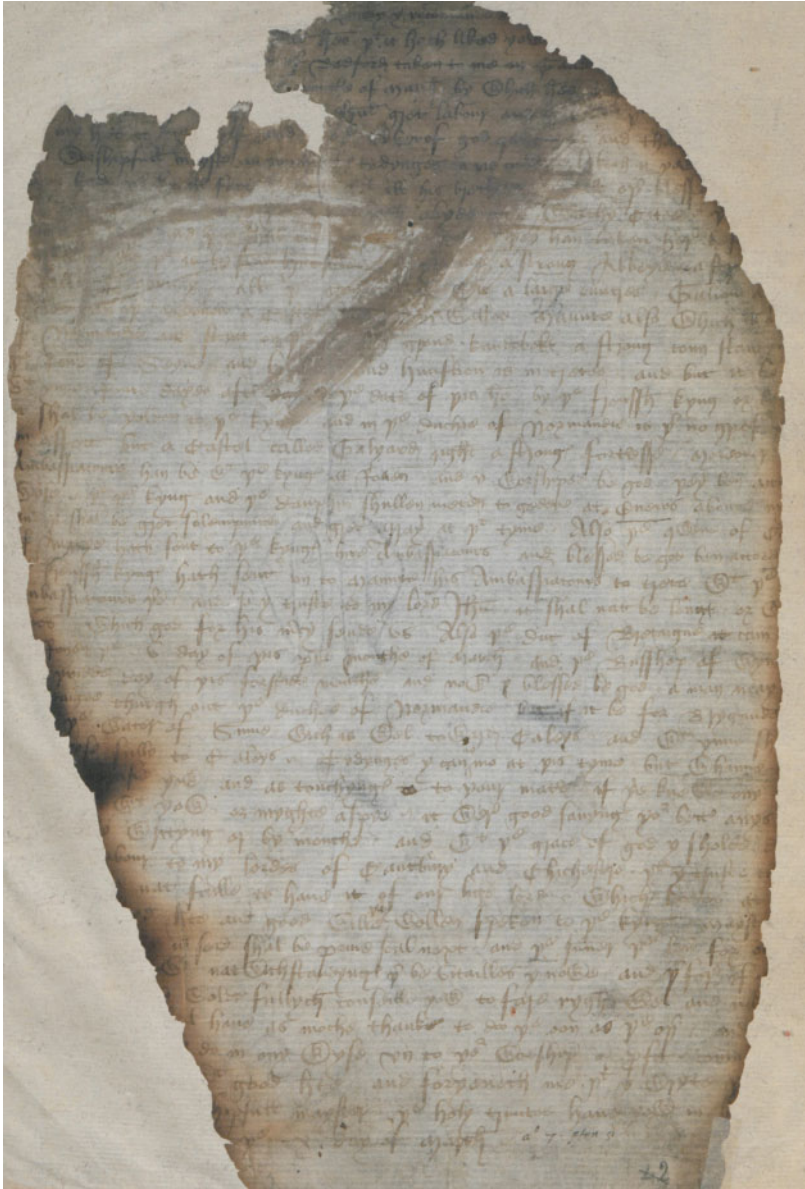


Fig. 3. Personal letter sent by the Privy Seal (under)clerk R[ichard] P[riour] to Robert Frye, dated at Rouen, 10 March 1419 © The British Library Board (BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 55r).

middle generation. But unlike Hethe, Offord, and Hoccleve, the scribes of the younger group sign their documents only with their surname.

Alberton, who spent four decades at the PSO, is designated as a 'London Gentleman': like Benet and Hoccleve, both of whom were married, he was a lay

person.⁵⁷ Offord's 1420 letter from Sens addresses him as 'Will. Albtoo', echoing his scribal signature, consistently written as 'Albton'.⁵⁸ I identify him as one of the hands in Hoccleve's Formulary (BL, Add. 24,062), and he is the first hand to appear in this manuscript, underneath Benet's signature on f. 1v. Alberton's hand also appears on the slip inserted as ff. 158r–v.

Not much is known about Claydon, except that he may have been married.⁵⁹ His hand is difficult to ascertain because so far I have only been able to find a single document signed by him, a privy seal warrant for the great seal [Fig. 1, top].⁶⁰ However, the date of this record, 1422, points to an early point in his career, making it unlikely that it was written by his underclerk. It is therefore probably his own handwriting.

The archival record for Benet suggests that he was younger than Hoccleve and the other Privy Seal clerks discussed so far. Benet is of interest because his name appears on the first folio of Hoccleve's Formulary. The text just below, however, is in Alberton's handwriting, though Benet's hand appears in three places in the main text in the manuscript: 5v, on the bottom of 124r, and on the slip inserted as ff. 35r–v. The hand in these three places corresponds in aspect, duct, and letterforms to the records signed by him, and, importantly, the signature at the top of f. 1v is consistent with that used by him elsewhere, including a privy seal warrant for the great seal, dated 30 May 1442, which strengthens the likelihood that this is indeed his hand.⁶¹ After Offord's death in 1442, Benet took over his corrody, and in his will of 1468 Benet bequeaths to a relative a copy of Pseudo-Augustine's *Meditations* that he had received from William Alnwick.⁶² Alnwick was appointed keeper of the Privy Seal in 1422, and it is therefore likely that Hoccleve's Formulary was a handover document overseen by the poet between 1423 and 1424, not necessarily because of his seniority but because he was the only experienced Westminster-based PSO clerk available at the time: Bailey had died in 1420, Frye had retired in 1421, Offord was younger and, like Hethe, had spent a number of the preceding years in France.⁶³

The hands of these three clerks show a much stronger influence of contemporary forms of *lettre bâtarde* (also called *lettre bourguignonne* and *cursiva formata*

57 Gordon-Kelter, 'Lay Presence', 62.

58 TNA C 81/729/5901, privy seal warrant for the great seal, dated 18 April 1442 at Windsor. Rymer, the editor of the *Foedera*, may have mistranscribed '-n' as '-o'. Daniel Wakelin has suggested to me that perhaps Rymer missed an '-er-' contraction in 'Albtoo'.

59 Gordon-Kelter, 'Lay Presence', 61–2, 64.

60 TNA C 81/669/1184, printed in Déprez, *Études de diplomatique anglaise*, 31–2.

61 TNA C 81/729/5964. The following documents are also in Benet's hand: (English) TNA C 81/729/5913, C 81/729/5915, C 81/729/5919, C 81/729/5922, C 81/729/5955, C 81/729/5927, C 81/729/5969A, C 81/729/5970; (French) C 81/729/5959], C 81/729/5964; and (Latin) TNA C81/729/5907B, C 81/729/5916, C 81/729/5920, C 81/729/5925B, C 81/729/5956, C 81/729/5963, C 81/729/5969B.

62 For Benet's will, see TNA PROB 11/6, ff. 36r–37v; for that of his widow Alice, proved on 4 November 1474, see PROB 11/6, f. 125r–v (Alice's will slipped through the TNA's digitization net and should be located between PROB 11/6/258 and 259). On Alnwick: Rosemary C. E. Hayes, 'Alnwick, William (d. 1449), Bishop of Norwich and Lincoln', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> accessed 18 February 2020.

63 Elna-Jean Young Bentley, 'The Formulary of Thomas Hoccleve', PhD thesis, Emory University, 1965, vii–viii, dates the Formulary to 1422–1425, though the latest document in the collection can be dated to July 1424.

hybrida), a deluxe version of cursiva employed in books and prestigious documents, whereas the handwriting of Hethe, Offord, Frye, and Hoccleve draws on earlier secretary models and, in particular, *lettre courante*, a calligraphic version of *cursiva formata* (the equivalent to *bastard secretary* in England) that is less elaborate than its larger cousin *lettre bâtarde*.⁶⁴ The feature consistently distinguishing the later three hands is the shape of **g** and the angle of the shafts of **f** and long-**s**. All three use a flat-topped **g** [C32–5] with differences in the tail: Alberton prefers a hooked tail curling to the right [C35], as in TNA C 81/729/5901, line 1, ‘Dengleterre’, and Add. 24,062, f. 1v., line 3, ‘greable’; Benet’s **g** has a simple tail curling to the left (C 81/729/5964, line 1, ‘grace’) or a flat top with a tail to the left [C32], though he uses a tail hooked to the right in French documents (as in C 81/729/5964 throughout and in the last line, ‘regne’, and in his stint in Hoccleve’s *Formulary*); whereas Claydon’s **g** features a longer tail with a sharp z-shaped hook to the right [Fig. 1, top, line 2, ‘grace’]. Alberton’s hand is marked by an angular duct of 74° with playful use of hair-strokes and minor ornamental flourishes. Benet’s hand is angular too, with an increased amount of hairlines and otiose strokes. The hand is more upright, set at an angle of 78°. The spacing of words is wider and the size of the letters is larger, belonging to the next generation of Privy Seal clerks. As with Benet’s hand, Claydon’s displays a certain playfulness and higher degree of otiose strokes [Fig. 1, top]. At 80°, it is more upright than the handwriting of Benet and Alberton.

The Hands and Stints in Hoccleve’s *Formulary*

Now that Benet’s and Alberton’s handwriting has been identified, it is possible to distinguish all scribal stints in Hoccleve’s *Formulary*:

- Stint 1: William Alberton (Hand 1). ff. 1v (the signature ‘Benet’ at the top is in Benet’s hand)
- Stint 2: Hoccleve (Hand 2), 2r–5r
- Stint 3: Henry Benet (Hand 3), 5v
- Stint 4: Hoccleve, 6r–v, 7r–30r
- Stint 5: Benet, 31r
- Stint 6: Hoccleve, 31v–102r
- [Slip inserted as 35r–v: Benet]
- Stint 7: Hand 4, 102v
- Stint 8: Hoccleve, 103r–104r
- Stint 9: Hand 4, 104v top
- Stint 10: Hoccleve, 104v bottom
- Stint 11: Hand 4, 105r–109v
- Stint 12: Hoccleve, 110r–124r top
- Stint 13: Benet, 124r bottom
- Stint 14: Hoccleve, 126r–144v
- Stint 15: Hand 5, 145r–154r
- Stint 16: Hoccleve, 154v–160r
- [Slip inserted as 158r–v: Alberton]

64 Derolez offers a good definition of *lettre bâtarde* (*cursiva formata hybrida*) in *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books*, 157–60.

Stint 17: Hand 5, 160v–161v top
 Stint 18: Hoccleve, 161v bottom–162r top
 Stint 19: Hand 5, 162r middle
 Stint 20: Hoccleve, 162r bottom–162v top
 Stint 21: Hand 5, 162v bottom–163v top
 Stint 22: Hoccleve, 163v bottom–187r
 Stint 23: Hand 5, 187v–188r top
 Stint 24: Hoccleve, 188r bottom–189v top
 Stint 25: Hand 5, 189v bottom–190v top
 Stint 26: Hoccleve, 190v bottom–201v
 [Slip inserted between 192v and 193r: Hand 6, not contemporary]

There are in total five contemporary privy seal hands in the manuscript, not counting the slip inserted after f. 192v, which is in a later hand.

John Foston and John Hamond

A privy seal warrant of 4 March 1459, given at Sheen, is signed by the Privy Seal clerk John Foston.⁶⁵ He appears in a petition of c.1440–1441 together with other Privy Seal clerks,⁶⁶ but because the writ appears almost 20 years after he is first mentioned as having been active for a number of years already, it is not possible to offer a secure attribution without seeing other records signed by him. Further letters with Foston's signature certainly exist at The National Archives (TNA).⁶⁷ Signed writs by more Privy Seal clerks have survived, including a number by John Hamond, who is first mentioned in 1446.⁶⁸

From the Privy Seal to the Council: Robert Frye and Richard Caudray

Robert Frye is the highest-ranking of the Privy Seal clerks covered in this article. He produced documents already in the 1380s and 1390s, and moved early to the Council, becoming its clerk until Richard Caudray's appointment in 1421.⁶⁹ Frye was also the secondary in the PSO, a senior appointment to which none of the other clerks under discussion ascended. His life and career have been discussed by Brown in detail.⁷⁰

Frye's characteristic scribal sign, a thick serifed upper-case **F**, is found in numerous charters and documents.⁷¹ His hand is very upright, with the shafts of **f** and long-**s** written at an angle of 88°. Chaplais draws attention to some of Frye's features, including his typical descenders in the margin and the last line of certain documents. These are usually long upright tapered tails with a large loop shaped like a Greek alpha.⁷² Frye's hand is attested in many documents, including his personal

65 TNA C 81/1375/13.

66 Benskin, 'Chancery Standard', 16, n. 23.

67 Dodd, 'Trilingualism', 266, n. 35.

68 These include not only Hamond but also Thomas Frank, John Foston, Richard Langeport, Richard Priour, and John Brewster (Benskin, 'Chancery Standard', 16; Dodd, 'Trilingualism', 266, n. 35). I shall discuss these in future publications.

69 On Caudray, see McSheffrey, 'Richard Caudray', and Sobecki, *Last Words*, 101–26.

70 Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 260–81, and *The Early History of the Clerkship*. See also Woodger, 'Robert Frye II (d.1435)'.

71 For instance, Edinburgh UL, MS 183*, f. 39r.

72 Chaplais, *EMDP II*, 16.

correspondence,⁷³ and the extensive fifteenth-century formulary containing privy seal and signet letters that is now Edinburgh University Library MS 183*, sometimes referred to as 'Royal Letter Book'.⁷⁴ The following folios of Edinburgh UL, MS 183 are certainly written in Frye's hand: 32v top only, ff. 39r, 42v, 45v, 49r, 50r, 52r, 56r, 67r, 78r, 79r, 80v top and bottom only, 134v, 136r–v, 143r, 146r–v, 153r–v, 154v top only. By contrast, ff. 126v–127r are in a hand that shares certain features with BL, MS Arundel 38 (notably the looped tail on **g**), but this scribe was probably not a Privy Seal clerk. Similarly, f. 59r of Edinburgh UL, MS 183 is not by a Privy Seal clerk, whereas the following folios are in a single chancery anglicana hand: 83r, 88v–89r, 91r, 94r, 95v–96r, 100v–101r, 116v–117r.

Frye is also the main hand in the first part of the Book of the Council,⁷⁵ a collection of copies and original Council documents now spread over two manuscripts, BL, MSS Cleopatra F. iii and iv, extending from the end of the reign of Richard II to 1435.⁷⁶ The majority of these records are in the hands of Frye (up to 1421) and his successor Richard Caudray (from 1421 to 1435).⁷⁷ Frye's stints in the various grades of privy seal secretary (minuting, drafting, regular, and engrossed) are: items 3–6, 8, 10.2 bottom, 12, 13.1, 13.2, 14–18, 18.2, 22, 26–7, 29.1, 30, 32, 33.2, 34–40, 41.2, 42.3, 43–5, 47–50, 55.2, 56.2, 57–60, 65–6, 73.2, 74, 76, 77.2, 78, 80–81, 84, 90.1, 92–3, 95.1–95.2, 96–101, 103, 105, 106.1, 107.2, 108.1, 112–30, 134–8, 139.3, 141–3, 146.2, 147.1, 148.2, 163.2, 164.1, 165–7, 169–70, 174.2, 175–88, 189.2, 190–91, 194.2, 195.1, 196, 197.2, 199–203, and 206.2. The remaining items either belong to Signet and Chancery scribes or are later and written by Caudray, whose hand first appears in MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii, item 207. There are also two documents in Frye's hand in MS Cotton Caligula D. v, ff. 12v–13v and 23r. In many ways, Frye's handwriting serves as a model privy seal secretary hand, exemplifying many of the features that mark his colleagues' work.

Frye is another Privy Seal clerk to have written out poetry in addition to his possible appearance in the *Gesta* in BL, MS Harley 219. It has been observed before that Edinburgh UL, MS 183* contains on f. 154v six lines of a French poem in Frye's hand.⁷⁸ The poem is actually Jacques de Longuyon's widely circulated early fourteenth-century *Les Voeux de Paon*, one of the two main sources for John Barbour's *The Buik of Alexander*.⁷⁹ The six lines are written in Frye's highest-grade hand, featuring his characteristic alpha-looped tails in the bottom line on **s** and **p**.

In his informal note-taking hand Frye employs the round-**w**, tilting to the left [Fig. 4, right image]. This angular execution can be easily distinguished from the

73 TNA E 28/29.

74 On these letters in TNA 28/29, see Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 260–81.

75 Sobceki, *Last Words*, 116–23.

76 On this unusual set of documents, see Brown, *The Early History of the Clerkship*, 21–7, and my discussion in *Last Words*, 116–23. The Book of the Council has been printed in Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances* 3–4.

77 Sobceki, *Last Words*, 116–23.

78 *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Richard II*, ed. Edouard Perroy (London, 1933), xxiv.

79 There are two complete modern editions: Camillus Casey, 'Les voeux du Paon by Jacques de Longuyon: An Edition of the Manuscripts of the P Redaction', PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1956, and John Barbour, *The Buik of Alexander*, ed. by R. L. Graeme Ritchie, Scottish Text Society New Series, 12, 17, 21, 25, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1921–1929). More than 45 manuscripts of *Les Voeux du Paon* are extant.

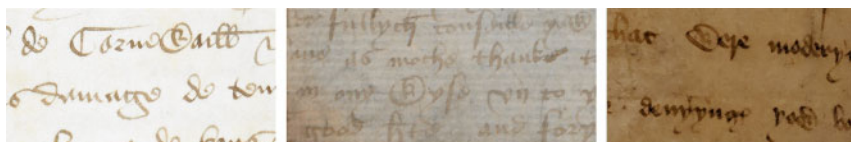


Fig. 4. Left: Hoccleve's Formulary © The British Library Board (BL, MS Add. 24,062, f. 101v); middle: letter sent from France by R[ichard] P[riour] to Robert Frye © The British Library Board (BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 55r); right: Robert Frye's hand © The British Library Board (BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii, item 185).

round-**w** shapes of Hoccleve or Priour, which are identical and usually show in the upper-left corner of the oval the fold where the oval stroke is meant to close [Fig. 4, left and middle images, respectively]. Frye never writes a coat hanger **g**; instead he prefers forms with left-curling tail, often placed tightly underneath the baseline and sometimes finished with a hook. It is the absence of idiosyncratic letterforms in combination with his descenders and scribal sign that marks his hand.

When Frye stepped down from the Council in 1421, he was replaced by Richard Caudray, who did not have a Privy Seal background.⁸⁰ Caudray was an experienced administrator and canon lawyer, who enjoyed the protection of Henry Chichele throughout his career. In addition to appointments to ecclesiastical courts, Caudray spent much time in France between 1418 and 1422, writing for the chancery in Rouen, working as a scribe and notary during Anglo-French negotiations, and serving as Henry V's secretary. He was also part of the notarial group tasked with exemplifying the Treaty of Troyes—the presentation copy for Charles VI of this treaty was written out by Hethe. In France, Caudray directly supervised Hethe, who was seconded to the Signet Office there, and he may have come into contact with Offord and perhaps other Privy Seal clerks based there at the time. After all, the king's secretary was the keeper of the king's Signet and ran the Signet Office.⁸¹ In addition, the Privy Seal clerk Henry Benet is described as Caudray's clerk in the 1430s.⁸²

Caudray's hand has not been identified until now. Only one letter is known to have been signed by him, an English signet warrant dated at Mantes 23 June 1419.⁸³ His hand is set an angle of 73°, and thus more tilted than those of Privy Seal clerks. The regular roundish secretary hand in this letter—a hand not found in any other signet or privy seal record examined so far—matches in appearance and letterforms the hand responsible for the majority of those sections of the Book of the Council that were written during his tenure as Clerk of the Council, now predominantly in MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iv. This identification is corroborated by another letter, the contents of which reveal that it was sent by Caudray during his tenure as the king's secretary (BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 85). This badly damaged personal letter in English to Henry V, dated at Paris, 17 June 1420, has been written in the same hand as the signet warrant of 23 June 1419, but has not been previously linked to

80 The following account of Caudray's life and career is taken from Brown, *The Early History of the Clerkship*, McSheffrey, 'Richard Caudray', and Sobecki, *Last Words*, 101–26.

81 Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary*, 106.

82 Brown, *The Early History of the Clerkship*, 28–9; Sobecki, *Last Words*, 109, n. 35, 120.

83 TNA C81/1365/7.

Caudray.⁸⁴ In the letter, Caudray impresses on the king the food shortage among the Parisians and arranges to pass on a copy of Ptolemy to Henry with the words ‘that I Caudray wrote to you of’ (penultimate line). Caudray served on the Council until 1435, at which time, as I argue elsewhere, he may have turned to composing the *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*.⁸⁵

II. REVISED CHARACTERISTICS OF THOMAS HOCCLEVE’S HANDWRITING

Thomas Hoccleve’s handwriting has been a focus of scholarship for much of the last 80 years. The characteristics of his hand were first described by H. C. Schulz, then enlarged by A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, and further refined by Linne Mooney.⁸⁶ There are now four literary manuscripts securely identified as having been written solely or largely in his hand: Durham, University Library, Cosin MS V. iii. 9 (*The Series*); London, British Library, MS Harley 219, recently identified by Schieberle (in Hoccleve’s hand are extracts from the *Gesta Romanorum*, some of Odo of Cheriton’s *Fables*, Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre Othea*, and an English-French glossary); and San Marino, Huntington Library MSS HM 111 and HM 744 (collections of his shorter poems).⁸⁷ In addition, there are two further literary manuscripts that may contain additions or corrections in his hand (certain attribution: Scribe E in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.2, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, ff. 82r–84r, first column; possible attribution: Hand F in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 392 D [*Hengwrt*], Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, ff. 83v, line 24 from fourth term; 138v, lines 25 b–26; and 150r, line 30).⁸⁸ In his role as a Privy Seal clerk

84 TNA C 81/1365/24.

85 *Last Words*, 101–26.

86 H. C. Schulz, ‘Thomas Hoccleve, Scribe’, *Speculum*, 12 (1937), 71–81; P. J. Croft, *Autograph Poetry in the English Language*, 2 vols (London, 1973), 1. 3–4; Anthony G. Petti, *English Literary Hands from Chaucer to Dryden* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), pl. 7; A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, ‘The Production of Copies of *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century’, in M. B. Parkes and Andrew Watson (eds), *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to NR Ker* (London, 1978), 163–210 (182–3); A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, ‘Palaeographical Introduction’, in Paul A. Ruggiers (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales. A Facsimile and Transcription of the Hengwrt Manuscript with Variants from the Ellesmere Manuscript* (Norman, OK, 1979), M; Burrow and Doyle, *Facsimile*, xxxiv–xxxvii; Linne R. Mooney, ‘Some New Light on Thomas Hoccleve’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 29 (2007), 293–340 (318–22). For the most recent discussion of Hoccleve’s handwriting, see Lawrence Warner, *Chaucer’s Scribes: London Textual Production, 1384–1432* (Cambridge, 2018), 115–33.

87 Linne Mooney’s proposed attribution to Hoccleve of British Library, MS Royal 17 D. xviii, a copy of the *Regement of Princes*, has not met with broad acceptance (‘A Holograph Copy of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 33 (2011), 263–96), largely because this identification departs substantially from the criteria established by Schulz, Doyle and Parkes, and Mooney herself. The case against this identification is made most comprehensively by Warner, *Chaucer’s Scribes*, 116–25. Daniel Wakelin cautiously anticipated certain problems with this attribution (*Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge, 2014), 283, n. 33). I return to BL, MS Royal 17 D. xviii in the conclusion below.

88 Whereas Doyle and Parkes identify Hoccleve as Scribe E with certainty in Trinity R.3.2 (‘The Production of Copies’, 182–3), they ‘leave open’ the possibility that Hand F in Hengwrt is Hoccleve (‘Palaeographical Introduction’, xlv). Simon Horobin argues that a handful of additions and corrections made by Hands C, D, and E in the Hengwrt manuscript are also in Hoccleve’s hand (‘Thomas Hoccleve: Chaucer’s First Editor?’, *The Chaucer Review*, 50 (2015), 228–50), but it is difficult to make this identification on the basis of the corrections alone, given the absence of letterforms associated with Hoccleve

Hoccleve also produced the bulk of the PSO formulary BL, MS Add. 24,062. Furthermore, Mooney has identified Hoccleve's hand in over 100 documents in the National Archives, and Helen Killick has added a further 900 written by him as Privy Seal clerk, though these attributions will need to be re-evaluated in light of the findings presented here on Hoccleve's fellow Privy Seal clerks.⁸⁹ Thus, with perhaps over 1,000 probable documents and seven manuscripts to his name, Hoccleve is one of the best-documented medieval English scribes.

The characteristics of Hoccleve's handwriting were established at a time when the hands of his peers at the PSO had not been identified. Now that they have been, it is possible to adjust the criteria to differentiate his hand from that of contemporary clerks writing privy seal secretary. In what follows, I will reassess the characteristics of Hoccleve's handwriting so as to allow a comparison with his peers, in particular Hethe and Offord, using as my reference observations on Hoccleve's hand made by Schulz, Doyle, Parkes, and Mooney. To better understand Hoccleve's hand and to distinguish him from his colleagues I will consider two components necessarily in conjunction: aspect and letterforms. In both cases, the new findings can now crystallize the most essential features in these two components.

Aspect

To my mind the most individuating feature of the overall aspect of Hoccleve's handwriting across his range of the privy seal secretary script—from rapid minuting (the Formulary) over informal (the Huntington and Durham holographs) to standard (TNA documents)—is the combination of *the specific upright angle of 80°* with the *liberal spacing of individual letters*. First, whereas the shafts of initial **f** and long-**s** at the start of a line often have an angle of 87°, in subsequent words they are consistently slanted at 80°. Second, Hoccleve sets his letters apart to the extent that they do not always touch. This is a consistent feature not shared by any of the documents so far encountered written by Privy Seal clerks. This loose spacing creates a gap-toothed appearance, and is usually a characteristic of untrained hands. This would help to explain why Hoccleve's handwriting never matches the elegant appearance of that of his peers.

Letterforms

The coat hanger **g** [Fig. 4, left, 'damage'] has been frequently described as Hoccleve's most characteristic letter, perhaps in combination with his round-**w** [Fig. 4, left, 'Cornewall(e)']. Hoccleve's coat hanger **g** is used in identical form by Hethe and Offord. To my knowledge, this particular graph is rare among Privy Seal clerks, and I have not come across it in PSO records other than written by these three colleagues. All three clerks deploy the coat hanger **g** and the other variants ascribed to Hoccleve.

(Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes*, 128–30). To my mind, Hand C could be that of other Privy Seal scribes who regularly use the **g** form employed in the missing Monk's Tale stanza supplied on f. 89v—Frye and especially Hethe and Offord are plausible candidates, with Offord and Hethe coming closest. Hand E, which supplies the phrase 'at messe' on f. 80v offers too little evidence beyond being a government secretary hand.

89 Mooney, 'Some New Light', 293–340; Killick, 'Thomas Hoccleve as Poet and Clerk'.

The other letter that is most readily being associated with Hoccleve is **w**, in particular one form that has been described as his most distinctive feature: ‘a round or oval **w** made usually with only two strokes, the second like a 2 within the circle’.⁹⁰ However, there is nothing particular in Hoccleve’s usage of this letterform. My examination of hundreds of government documents written in secretary scripts shows that the round-**w** is the standard shape of **w** in what I would characterize as the lowest grade of government secretary, reserved for drafts, minutes, and personal letters composed in a hurry. This letterform has been borrowed by English secretary scripts from anglicana business hands from the very beginning, but in fifteenth-century government contexts it belongs to minuting and draft grades of secretary. The round-**w** form virtually never appears in the privy seal writs and warrants identified as having been written in Hoccleve’s hand, nor does it feature in any other privy seal record that was not a draft or formulary template. The examples in Fig. 4 show in what type of document this variant usually occurs. Frye’s minutes and quickly drafted notes in the Book of the Council regularly feature the round-**w**, as in MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii, item 185 [Fig. 4, right]. Whereas the shape of the framing oval in Frye’s round-**w** indicates a different duct and therefore writing angle, the **w** employed by the Privy Seal scribe Richard Priour, who may have been an underclerk at the time, is virtually indistinguishable from Hoccleve’s.⁹¹

I should add that the round-**w** is sensitive to grade and not to the choice of language. Of course, neither Latin nor continental French feature **w**, but the letter appears in French and Latin texts in English personal and place names. It is also sometimes used in Anglo-French words, especially those of Norman descent such as ‘wardein’ or ‘lowage’—the latter even appears with a round-**w** in a French line in Harley 219 on f. 151v, l. 2 from the bottom, either in Hoccleve’s or in Priour’s hand. Frye’s Council drafts and minutes include many round-**w** in French and Latin texts.

Knowing the grade to which the round-**w** belongs holds one very important corollary for literary studies: Hoccleve’s frequent use of this letterform in the Huntington and Durham holographs and the consistent omission of the round-**w** in the literary texts in Harley 219 shows that the first three manuscripts (unlike Harley 219) were most likely never intended for presentation and, in the case of the Durham holograph, certainly not directed at Countess Joan of Westmorland. Such claims about Hoccleve’s holograph manuscripts have been made,⁹² but one could argue that it was fitting for persons of moderate social status to present influential recipients with humble, unilluminated copies of works, especially if they were close acquaintances of the dedicatee. Modest books of this kind include George Ashby’s *Active Policy of a Prince* (Cambridge, UL, MS Mm 4.42) and John Skelton’s *A Lawde and Prayse* (TNA E 36/228).⁹³ However, it remains questionable whether a book written in a minuting variant of a cursive hand would have been deemed acceptable by certain

90 Mooney, ‘Some New Light’, 319, elaborating on Doyle and Parkes, ‘The Production of Copies’, 163–210.

91 Thomas Frank is said to have been Frye’s underclerk in 1423 (Brown, ‘The Privy Seal Clerks’, 262), but by that time Frye was secondary in the PSO, after more than two decades as clerk of the Council. Surely, he had had more than one clerk supporting him. Richard Firth Green suggests that Priour succeeded Hoccleve (‘Three Fifteenth-Century Notes’, *English Language Notes*, 14 (1976), 14–17).

92 For Huntington HM 111: Mooney, ‘Some New Light’, 308; for the Durham Series: J. A. Burrow (ed.), *Thomas Hoccleve’s Complaint and Dialogue*, EETS OS 313 (Oxford, 1999), xviii, 117.

93 On Ashby’s manuscript, which I have identified as a holograph, see *Last Words*, 183–4.

patrons. Harley 219 does not feature this letter in its core texts (though it does appear in the less formal English-French glossary at the end). Instead, the higher grades of privy seal secretary used in this manuscript may suggest that this book was destined to reach a particular recipient.

The second consequence is that the role of the round-*w* must be adjusted among the characteristics of Hoccleve's handwriting. It is virtually absent from Hoccleve's regular grade of secretary (Harley 219, the Hengwrt MS, or all extant government documents in his hand, including his attempts at a secretary book hand in the Trinity Gower, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.2), and in the case of the lower grade, the round-*w* is of limited use because virtually all similar hands (Frye, Priour) employ this letterform.

A number of other letterforms that have been advanced in the past as Hoccleve's, although helpful, cannot be used to identify his hand securely because even in combination with each other they appear frequently in the hands of Hoccleve's peers. Specifically, the letterforms that can be rejected for an infeasible identification of his handwriting because they are as common for some of the other clerks as for Hoccleve are as follows (the numbers refer to the eight numbered features used by Mooney in her overview):⁹⁴

- (1) Square-topped **A**. For instance, Frye uses square-topped **A** throughout his stint in Edinburgh UL, MS 183, f. 146r,* l. 11, 'Anglie'.
- (2) Flat-topped **g** *without* a coat hanger hook [C32, C34–5]. All of Hoccleve's non-coat-hanger forms of this letter are frequently used by his fellow clerks.
- (3) Complex or anglicana **W** [CA34, CA36]. Frye uses it throughout his stint in Edinburgh UL, MS 183, f. 146r,* l. 8, 'Wodestok'. Hethe and other clerks employ similar forms.
- (7) Initial **V** with distinct spike to the left at the bottom of the initial downstroke. For instance, Offord in Harley 219, f. 82v, fourth line from the bottom, 'Vices', and Frye throughout his stint in Edinburgh UL, MS 183.
- (8) Pointed top of kidney-shaped final **s** [C67]. A common form (Offord, TNA C 81/669/1204, line two, 'leutenantes').
- (9) Uppercase **N** with sharply angular feet and stalk often detached from the rising stroke to the shoulder (a standard engrossed form, see Frye in Edinburgh UL, MS 183, f. 146r,* l. 9 from the bottom, 'Nos').

A New Process for Identifying Hoccleve's Handwriting

As a result, I suggest a more focused three-step process to identify Hoccleve's handwriting: (Unless otherwise indicated, the examples in A-C below refer to Durham, UL, MS Cosin V. iii. 9, f. 79v*).

- A. *Aspect*: the execution of the hand must match Hoccleve's upright privy seal secretary hand with its characteristic loose spacing for higher (e.g. Harley 219, TNA records) and lower grade (e.g. Huntington and Durham MSS) varieties. Hoccleve's hand is unusual in consistently employing two different

94 Mooney, 'Some New Light', 318–9.

angles for **f** and long-**s**: at the beginning of a line or sentence in initial position the graphs are written at an angle of 87° , but in subsequent words and positions they are set at 80° .

- B. *Associative probability of letterforms more common to Hoccleve than to other scribes, by grade*: most if not all forms must be present. In the case of the higher grade, these must be the coat hanger **g** (l. 3, 'greet') and the lower-bodied **h** (l. 2, 'hadde'). For the lower grade these are round-topped **A**, the round-**w** (l. 1, 'wys'), the coat hanger **g**, the lower-bodied **h**, and the z-shaped tironian **et** with a tail that curls back up through the head of the letter.
- C. *Associative probability of letterforms not attested to occur together among Hoccleve's peers*: coat hanger **g**, lower-bodied **h**, and, for the lower grade, **y** with a tail that curls back up through the head of the letter (l. 1, 'Wys'). This form of **y** does appear in informal grades of privy seal secretary (see BL, MS Cotton Caligula D. v, f. 55, l. 1, 'y', in Priour's hand [Fig. 3], and BL, MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii, items 12, 35, 80, 127, and 185 [Fig. 4, right, 'denying(e)'] [all Frye], as well as 11, 35, 67, and 86 [other Privy Seal clerks]). However, I have so far not encountered this letterform in Hethe and Offord, the two hands closest to Hoccleve's standard grade, but Frye and Priour, whose lower grade resembles Hoccleve's, do use it. Only if combined do **g** and **h** in the standard grade, or all three letterforms in the case of the lower grade, amount to the single feature of Hoccleve's handwriting that does not occur in any of the texts identified to have been written by his peers.

These revised criteria acknowledge Schulz's statement, reiterated by Doyle, Parkes, and Mooney, that it is not the individual letterforms 'but the conjunction of three or more (with, as Schulz noted, the correct duct, angularity, etc., for Hoccleve's hand)' that becomes 'a strong indicator of his hand'.⁹⁵

Some Conclusions for the Handwriting of Hoccleve and Other Privy Seal Clerks

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this overview of the handwriting of Hoccleve's contemporaries at the Privy Seal. First, there is no evidence so far that Hoccleve was a talented scribe employed on prestigious projects. His hand seems inflexible, and the generous spacing of the letters looks less professional in execution than the handwriting of his colleagues. Even in the Hengwrt manuscript (if it is indeed him) and the Trinity Gower he cannot leap across the anglicana-secretary divide and still ends up writing a secretary variety, even though his colleague Hethe executes some of late medieval England's most prestigious documents in the highest grade of bastard secretary. Hoccleve's countless professional productions do not match the refined execution of Offord's *Secretum* in Harley 219. Finally, there is no evidence for any such commissions for Hoccleve, even though we have two vital treaties written out by Hethe for the duke of Burgundy and the king of France, a commission for Hethe from Henry V for a large bible, the Harley 219 *Secretum* by

95 Mooney, 'Some New Light', 319–20.

Offord, and two payments for charters written by a number of Privy Seal scribes, including Priour and John Welde, Hoccleve's underclerk. In this light it is telling that none of the surviving presentation copies of *The Regement of Princes* has been convincingly shown to be in Hoccleve's hand, a point sometimes explained as the result of Hoccleve not having the time for such 'time-consuming and high-end productions'.⁹⁶ But his peer Hethe was similarly busy yet wrote for and accepted high-end commissions for the kings of France and England.

Second, there is no evidence for assigning to Hoccleve a leading role in the Privy Seal.⁹⁷ The number of Privy Seal clerks fluctuated, but the total ranged from six in 1400, to 12 in 1422, whereas only five clerks and seven underclerks were acknowledged in 1441.⁹⁸ The term 'underclerk' (*subclericus*) only appeared in 1421, although such arrangements may have existed earlier.⁹⁹ This means that the number of core or senior clerks ranged from 4 to 6, and with Bailey having died in 1420 and both Hethe and Offord spending years abroad, Hoccleve was probably either the only one or one of two or three experienced clerks who could prepare the Formulary. But Hoccleve was a poet who participated in London's production of literature, so there is every reason for his supervision of a literary manuscript such as Harley 219. Overseeing or assembling such a manuscript does not imply any hierarchical relationship. Furthermore, Offord's and various other Privy Seal clerks' contributions to Harley 219 and Frye's superb execution of the first six lines of the *Voeux de Paon* in Edinburgh UL, MS 183 demonstrate that Privy Seal clerks participated in the production of literary manuscripts and the copying of literary texts.

Third, Hoccleve's frequent use of the note-taking grade round-w in the Huntington and Durham holographs complicates claims that these codices were intended for presentation.

Fourth, some material attributed to Hoccleve needs to be reconsidered. Certain documents assigned to him are not in his hand; this includes records that have been used to argue for his ties to Chaucer, such as Chaucer's transfer of his annuities to John Scalby.¹⁰⁰ Among the literary attributions that require reconsideration are the revising hands in Hengwrt. It is less clear why the first hand in BL, MS Egerton 913 has ever been associated with Hoccleve.¹⁰¹ Doyle notes some of the similar letterforms and concludes that this stint was 'certainly not by him',¹⁰² but, given the dearth of splay, the angle of shading, the narrow nib, and untypical letterforms, I would now add that this is not a privy seal secretary hand at all.

96 Horobin, 'Thomas Hoccleve', 250.

97 Mooney speaks of his 'supervisory role, or his seniority' ('Some New Light', 298, 300).

98 Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262; Dodd, 'Trilingualism', 265.

99 Brown, 'Privy Seal Clerks', 262.

100 TNA C 81/500/4794, introduced by Killick, 'Thomas Hoccleve as Poet and Clerk', 86. (Killick notes the difficulty of identifying Hoccleve's hand during this early period.) This may suggest that the count of documents attributed by Killick to Hoccleve is too high, a point she accounts for in her argument.

101 Linne Mooney, 'Thomas Hoccleve in Another *Confessio Amantis* Manuscript', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 22 (2019), 225–38.

102 Burrow and Doyle, *Facsimile*, xxxv; Lawrence Warner, 'Scribes, Misattributed: Hoccleve and Pinkhurst', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 37 (2015), 55–100 (68–9).

Furthermore, BL, MS Royal 17 D. xviii is, as Lawrence Warner has shown, unlikely to be a holograph; however, I do believe that the hand may belong to a Privy Seal clerk.¹⁰³ Those letterforms in the manuscript that are not found elsewhere in Hoccleve's handwriting do appear in the handwriting of his peers, even the unusual lotus-shaped **w**, which Frye employs from time to time.¹⁰⁴ More relevantly, Priour's 1419 letter to Frye [Fig. 3], albeit written in an informal grade of privy seal secretary, shows a range of precise agreements in aspect and letterforms with Royal 7 D. xviii: these include, for instance, the simple non-Hocclevean **A** (Royal 17 D. xviii, f. 73v*, 'And', l. 7; Priour's letter, 'Abassiatours', l. 23 [Fig. 3]); **g** with an almost closed looped descender (Royal 17 D. xviii, f. 73v*, 'gider', l. 2; Priour's letter, 'gret', l. 5 [Fig. 3]), and **h** below the baseline (Royal 17 D. xviii, f. 73v*, 'his', penultimate line; Priour's letter, 'hath', l. 2 [Fig. 3]). That said, like Hoccleve and Frye but unlike the hand of Royal 17 D. xviii, Priour also prefers the spelling 'yow' over 'you'.¹⁰⁵ The writing angle, measured using **f** and long-**s**, is 84° and hence not Hoccleve's. To my mind, the greatest obstacle to attributing this manuscript to Hoccleve is that the grade in which it is written does not depart from the standard grade of the privy seal secretary hand while the individual letterforms do. Such a degree of disparity in letterforms could be justified by moving to a higher grade, but this is not the case with Royal 17 D. xviii.

However, the attribution to Hoccleve of BL, MS Cotton Vespasian B. Xxii*, made by Mooney at conferences is intriguing. This hand is probably that of a Privy Seal clerk, most likely from among the Hoccleve, Hethe, and Offord circle or an as yet unidentified clerk working in close contact with this group, such as John Bailey. The three steps for identifying Hoccleve's hand would have been met had the letter-spacing been wider and the angle less upright. The generic execution of Hethe-Offord-Hoccleve letterforms do not permit us to isolate the aspect of any of these three hands, although the writing angle of 87° is Offord's rather than Hoccleve's. Hethe's treaty hand and Offord's execution of the French *Secretum* in Harley 219 give us a good sense of their respective presentation scripts, but we do not know how Hoccleve's engrossed hand would look if he indeed had one. It is of course possible that Hethe and Offord would have had other presentation grades at their disposal, though it is arguable whether these would not have had to have been constructed from a strict privy seal secretary model. Therefore, although Cotton Vespasian B. xxii resembles the standard privy seal secretary grades of the Hethe-Offord-Hoccleve group, it departs from Hethe's and Offord's higher grades. However, the letterforms, closed spacing, and the slightly round duct point to Hethe, and it is not inconceivable that Cotton Vespasian B. xxii was his book hand.

In closing, a more nuanced understanding of the privy seal secretary script and Hoccleve's hand in particular opens up the prospect of new attributions. The two

103 Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes*, 116–25. In addition to Warner's objections, part of the evidence adduced for the apparent similarity of this hand to Hoccleve is f. 107v in Hoccleve's Formulary (Mooney, 'A Holograph Copy', 269–70). However, this particular folio is in the hand of another Privy Seal clerk, Hand 4 in my list of stints above, most likely a clerk of the younger generation, to which Benet, Alberton, and Claydon belong.

104 MS Cotton Cleopatra F. iii, item 60, left column, 'Wilughby'. I use Wakelin's description of this letterform (*Scribal Correction*, 283, n. 33).

105 This issue has been raised by Warner, 'Scribes, Misattributed', 63.

most reliable and sumptuous copies of *The Regement of Princes* are BL, MSS Arundel 38 and Harley 4866. Although both copies are written in or aspire to book hands, I think that Arundel 38* (1412–1413) may have been written by a Privy Seal clerk attempting his utmost to emulate an anglicana book hand. A closer look at the letterforms reveals a barely concealed privy seal secretary hand aiming at an upright, generously proportioned, and elegant book hand. That this hand is not entirely dissimilar from Hand C in Hengwrt, a possible candidate for Hoccleve, has been pointed out before, most recently by Simon Horobin, who attributes Hand C to Hoccleve and notes a few differences between the two hands, in particular the ‘diamond-shaped bowls in letters like **g** and **a**’ and a different form of **w**.¹⁰⁶ But these differences could also be explained by considering the high grade of the anglicana-inflected privy seal secretary at which the scribe of Arundel 38 aims.

Arundel 38 was probably written by a Privy Seal clerk whose secretary hand displays the *upright angle* and *loose letter spacing* found in Hoccleve’s handwriting in the PSO. In Hoccleve’s oeuvre there is nothing comparable to the *Regement*, nor is there an addressee to match Prince Henry. And while Arundel 38 is clearly a presentation copy, it was written by a scribe who is trying to stretch his privy seal secretary script to fit the momentous occasion behind the poem. The scribe’s attempt to elevate his hand suggests experimentation and inventiveness: the seven dedicatory lines beneath the famous illumination of Hoccleve kneeling before Prince Henry on f. 37r* feature two forms of **g** [l. 2, ‘gracious’; l. 4, ‘glorious’], three variants of the same complex **W** shape [l. 5, ‘whyche’; l. 6, ‘worthynesse’; l. 7, ‘Wyth’], two ways to express **h** [l. 2, ‘humble’; l. 6, ‘worthynesse’], three types of **y** [l. 1, ‘Ye’; l. 2, ‘My’; l. 4, ‘your’], and three graphs for **r** [l. 1, ‘Prince’; l. 2, ‘gracious’; l. 7, ‘spirit’]—and these are only some letterforms used to distinguish scribes. A good example of Hoccleve’s hand from a period closer to Arundel 38 is a previously unknown grant made to Chaucer, dated 9 February 1400.¹⁰⁷ Both hands show the same upright angular duct of 88° with identical spacing between letters. The Chaucer grant features a diamond-shaped **g** in ‘grace’, l. 1, or ‘grantees’, l. 3, and Hoccleve even uses diamond-shaped hooked **g** in the opening phrases of some of his documents (e.g. TNA C 81/667/948, ‘grace’, l. 1). The ornamental looped tails of **g** in Arundel 38 [l. 4, ‘glorious’] certainly belong to a higher grade, and are common among Hoccleve’s peers when they employ an engrossed version of their script (see, for instance, Pierre Chaplais, *EMDP II*, Plate 39, or the tails on **g** in Offord’s stint in Harley 219). However, simpler forms of a flat tail on **g** that protrudes that far left and even loops can be found in Hoccleve’s English-French glossary in Harley 219 (f. 151v, ‘grande’, l. 9, and ‘maugre’, l. 8). The complex **W** (C 81/667/948, ‘Westminstre’, l. 5; Arundel 38, ‘Whiche’, l. 5) and most

106 Horobin, ‘Thomas Hoccleve’, 232. The parallel was first suggested by Doyle and Parkes, ‘Palaeographical Introduction’, xlv. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton argues that these hands are identical: Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), 82.

107 TNA C 81/596/1351. This is a new Chaucer life-record: Sebastian Sobceki, ‘Stones Left Unturned (Pstt! More New Chaucer Life Records)’, *NCS Blog*, 2019 <<http://newchaucersociety.org/blog/entry/stones-left-untuned-pstt-more-new-chaucer-life-records>> accessed 5 October 2019. For a transcription, see Killick, ‘Thomas Hoccleve as Poet and Clerk’, 30–1.

other Hocclevean letterforms appear in Arundel 38, though sometimes in a slightly more elevated form to match the book hand aspiration of the underlying privy seal secretary. Given the well-documented arguments for Hoccleve's supervision of this copy,¹⁰⁸ the combination of a thinly veiled privy seal secretary hand with letterforms that appear in documents written by him, an upright duct, and letter spacing that resembles Hoccleve's make it possible that if he wrote a holograph copy of the *Regement*, it could have been Arundel 38. But in the absence of any secure evidence, we are not in a position to determine whether Hoccleve's high grade privy seal secretary hand (again, if he indeed possessed this skill) resembled Cotton Vespasian B. xxii, Arundel 38, or was altogether different.

***Digitized images (accessed 5 May 2020)**

- Durham, UL, MS Cosin V. iii. 9: <www.medievalscribes.com>
- Edinburgh UL, MS 183: <<https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/s/82y74c>>
- London, BL:
 - MS Arundel 38: <www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts>
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- Paris, Archives nationales, AE III 254: <www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/IR/Fran_IR_055193>

University of Groningen

108 For the suggestion that the *ordinationes* of Arundel 38 and Harley 4866 match those of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere *Canterbury Tales*, see Derek Pearsall, 'The Ellesmere Chaucer and Contemporary English Literary Manuscripts', in Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (eds), *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, CA, 1995/1995), 263–80 (271); Horobin, 'Thomas Hoccleve', 241 and *passim*.