

What Hath Wax
Brought?

Philip Liebson

For

Chicago Literary Club

2015-2016

April 4, 2016

I sit here and tap the letters on my computer and click the theme fonts; Times New Roman, Georgia and in a pixilated moment, Old English text. Easy to erase mistakes, rearrange sentences, add and subtract; not like the old days of mimeograph machines and typewriters. Writing is easy but our manipulations are faster than our thoughts. How easy it is to forget our efforts of 20 or 40 years ago, or our forefathers' and foremothers' efforts with quill pens on paper.

How many of you can go back in time? Yes, it is easy to close your eyes and see the images of your childhood. Ray Bradbury in *Dandelion Wine* had his young boy Douglas realize that he was a time machine and could go back five years but his elders could go as far back as 70, 80, or 90 years.

How about time before you were three or four years of age? Look back at photos of the 1920's, 1910s and 1900s. Do those pictures seem archaic with their old automobiles, ornate dress, strange lampposts, and lack of traffic lights? Is it possible that by focusing on one photograph you can propel yourself back to that time so that everything begins to look familiar and you see yourself with a straw hat and a striped shirt, or a long white dress with a floppy flowered hat and a parasol, walking along on a late summer day to the picnic, to the band concert, followed by a trip to the drug store and a taste of sarsaparilla?

Suppose you imagine yourself going further back in time. A book published in the 1970's, *Time and Again*, imagined a government project that could transport selected persons back to as early as the dinosaur age. The main character was transported back to 1882 in New York where he first resided in the Dakota apartment on Central Park West, although the Dakota was actually built in 1885. He eventually moved to a

boarding house and came to know the other boarders, to ride in the stuffy omnibuses with straw on the floor, to get involved in the entertainment of the time, the tableaux vivantes, or the lecturers drawing on slate. Gradually he became used to the times and decided that he much preferred the 1880's to the frenetic 1970's and remained there.

As far as I am concerned, it is impossible to familiarize yourself or place yourself back into a foregone era without gradually peeling back the changes year by year. That is the only way it can be accomplished.

Suppose for example, you transport yourself back to the medieval period. What would you like to be, a juggler, perhaps a lord or lady, probably the best bet in those sordid times, but don't get close to the king unless you want your head chopped off; certainly not a serf, but if you are interested in action, a knight, or amusement, a troubadour, poet or teller of epic tales. If you like the intellectual life, you can live in a monastery and read a book a year and have a regular day to day existence according to the Book of Hours. Your relative isolation from the secular world might also decrease your chances of succumbing to the plagues of those times, but not by much. One sure bet is that many of you listening tonight may think that a scribe's life might be ideal for the times with your involvement in books, charters and cartularies, that in your relative isolation you would record the worldly events and royal proclamations for posterity on lambskin or sheepskin. Yes, a scribe would be an almost ideal existence, with your daily activities carefully planned and with the knowledge that you are a subspecialist technician of those times, with an adequate remuneration if you are a royal scribe and special recognition if you are a scribe in a monastery.

Now that you have made your decision and have taken the time transport we shall give you several weeks to familiarize yourself with the language, food and drink, odors of your contemporaries, and day to day activities- we will place you in a royal scriptorium where you have easy familiarity with Latin, French and Old English. To make things relatively stable, we will place you in the year 1265 in England. Most of what you will be writing will be Latin, with possibly some French and unusually Old English. Yes, there would be quite a bit of language juggling, as we will relate.

As background, let us set the stage of England just before the Norman Conquest in 1066. The literate culture at the time was ensconced in the royal monasteries where scribes wrote on parchment. In Edward the Confessor's reign just before the Norman Conquest (1042-1066) documents were authenticated by a seal, only in possession of the king. Historical information in the shires and hundreds was obtained primarily by oral remembrance by elders, or specialists in remembrance. "Time out of mind"- that expression meant that remembrance was reliable at most for up to 100 years but would be justifiable in determining the legality of land charters. Land ownership was characteristically determined by a jury of 12 knights who gave oral testimony. Charters and chirographs, agreements between two parties, were used sparingly and derived from the traditions of the Roman Empire. Titles of property might be symbolized by specific objects such as swords, staffs cut from the land, or rings, which were conveyed when the property was issued. For example, a particular sword represented victory of the Anglo-Saxons over the Scots in 937 and was kept as a memento until at least the late 12th century. When Edward I needed such a symbol to reflect this earlier victory, with no sword available, he had to rely on a fissure in a rock presumably made with the sword by

the Anglo-Saxon king. The exchange of wedding rings is an example of such a continuing tradition. The few written charters were signed with crosses- only the king had an official seal.

Affirmation was thus accomplished by the parties using a cross for signature. It was only after the Reformation that signing with a cross implied illiteracy. Few charters were consulted anyway. Reliance was placed on oral communication by the reputed parties. Anglo-Saxon or Old English, of which there were many dialects, was the language of the people including the king. Old English was a specific dialect derived from Wessex, associated with the monastics and with the royal hierarchy. Most people could not read or if they could, they would read aloud to themselves. Most of written records at the time, that is, before William the Conqueror, in Latin or Old English, were charters or declarations of the king or grants by bishops. There was no conclusive evidence for a secretariat supporting the king's records- whatever was available might be carried around with the king in portable chests if needed- and the latter remained the case for several more centuries. More on that later. Scribes were especially venerated. The Apostles were depicted in illuminations as scribes. That is one reason I suggested that you become a scribe.

Now, on to your efforts. Let us suppose that you were a scribe in the Royal Chancery or Exchequer in the 13th century. The Chancery was responsible for the production of official documents. The Exchequer or Treasury produced charters or writs as well. Your efforts would involve writing a draft and then a "fair copy", the permanent record. You would be sitting on a chair, sometimes elaborately carved. In front of you if you were fortunate was a high writing desk. Let us say that you were preparing a rough draft.

Perhaps the requester of the document was dictating to you, or else he had provided some information and left it to you to prepare the final document, since you had technological expertise in writing that most authors did not. Such information included paragraphing, spacing, capital letters and glosses.

On hand would be a wax tablet for the draft, or a slip of parchment. Your equipment would include a quill pen, penknife or razor, inkhorn, various colored inks in receptacles, pumice, a goat's or boar's tooth, and, on damp days, a coal fire nearby. The tablet for preparation of the draft would be wood with a covering of colored wax in the form of a diptych, two pages. After the wax copy was finished it may have been shown to the author of the document and if approved, the "fair copy" would now be ready for writing on parchment. The parchment would be specially lined by you so that the words you were writing would be evenly placed on each line. This would include pricking small holes on the sides of the leaves to guide horizontal and vertical rulings. You would begin by scraping the parchment with the knife and use the pumice to smooth it. The tooth would be used to polish the surface. The hot coals would dry the ink on damp days, and possibly keep you warm. You would begin writing with the quill pen in one hand and a penknife in the other to erase letters if needed. You would leave room for illuminations and large letters which were a special talent of illuminators. Rubricators, other than illuminators, were specialists in entering colored initials in the script

As a scribe, if you were copying a manuscript, you would write based more on the auditory memory of a word, rather than the visual image. In other words, you would read aloud a few words from the original text, and copy them from memory, on and on

until the conclusion of the text. This undoubtedly had a role in changing the spelling of words to conform more to their sound.

Most manuscripts would contain more than one text and each text would begin with an opening title and end with a concluding title. Latin manuscripts would begin with the word *Incipit* (It begins) and end with the word *explicit* (it unfolds).

You might have to write dictations rapidly, the reason for changing book hand type of print to cursive. This came to use in the 12th century when speed was important, especially in business correspondence or royal letters. Book hand was described as symmetrical and closely written, whereas cursive was more flowing and freer, sometimes called court script, derived from the Chancery that was producing the most documents. Developed spontaneously by the court scribes. book hand persisted, however, into the 16th century when the printing press replaced it. A special type of script, gloss hand, intermediate between the two and smaller, would be used for commentaries around the text material. Glosses were introduced in the 12th century as marginal comments around texts, originally from the habit of scholastics making explanatory notes on spare space.

In your scriptorium would you prefer to be an expert in dictation or calligrapher? Many of the royal scribes were trained in dictation only, not in the special art of calligraphy. If you were merely a copyist, you might not know the meaning of the words or the concepts. If you were a monk, you would not need a scribe because you were trained in a scriptorium. Thus, as a scribe, you would have to be familiar with several types of script but there was no uniformity in your ability to spell names or use capital letters.

In secular England in the 12th century, permanently organized writing facilities were possessed only by the King. Central to this organization was the Exchequer, actually a square table in London that was the seat of the treasury. Accounts were received and audited on the large parchment pipe rolls, and receipts recorded on the wooden tallies. The organization of the treasury was centered on a clerk who was in charge of the scriptorium, and sat at the Exchequer table. He supervised scribes who wrote the writs and rolls. The clerks themselves were specialists, some simply writers, others composers. Special scribes were sometimes employed by royal beneficiaries, presumably to make the drafts of the final “fair copy” if approved.

Pipe rolls were developed by a scribe sitting at the Exchequer table, beside which the treasurer sat. Nearby was the Chancellor’s scribe who copied the pipe roll for the Chancery, supervised by a chancery clerk. There was also an Archdeacon who also supervised the pipe rolls and whose job it was to keep the treasurer awake as well. Plea rolls and Chancery rolls began in the early 13th century under King John, with records of transactions now being placed in the treasury. Over the next century, the authentication of documents, retention in archives, and transcription in rolls reached beyond the Exchequer and Chancery to the provinces. They were usually pipe rolls stitched together producing a long scroll. Eventually, by the end of the 13th century, these registers were recorded in books. Pipe rolls were secured by cords, or stitched head to tail in continuous length. Accounts from parts of England were collected at the end of each year and piled on top of each other and were of different sizes. Stitching them together was easier than piling them up, and this was the process used by the Chancery. The

Exchequer roll, or rotulus as it was called, consisted of several parchment membranes stitched together to a length usually of less than six feet.

In the 13th century, continuous rolls were used to record the history of the Kings of England as well as the whole history of England from the (presumed) time of the Trojans. Outside of royal records, rolls were used for legal and managerial textbooks and by lay landowners, who were unfamiliar with books. On a lighter side, rolls were used to demonstrate skills at language improvement, one being 9 feet long, and for recording of songs that minstrels could use, carrying the rolls around in their pouches. These rolls could be quite extensive, up to over 2 feet long but only 3 inches in width. Knights, minstrels and other laypersons might use rolls containing religious texts in the vernacular rather than Latin books. Extensive writings were in the form of rolls of parchment or books. Rolls were easy to store and convenient to send as messages. In synagogues, rolls were and still are the records of Jewish law as they were for documents of the Greco-Roman period. In the 12th century, Jews in England would swear oaths” on the roll” as Christians would swear on a gospel book. In medieval illustrations, Jesus holds a book unless he represents God of the Old Testament, in which case he holds a roll.

Your expertise as a scribe depended of course on your script. Cursive script had been used in late Roman culture and had been replaced by Carolingian miniscule. Unlike Roman writing, words were now separated in medieval texts, developed by Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks to better comprehend Latin in sacred scripts, since these monks were not versed well in that language . The conversion of script to Carolinian miniscule was most important and all its letters are still in use except for a tall s. Carolinian

miniscule appeared in the late 8th century. The letters were easier to write and read than previous cursives. There were fewer abbreviations and marked reduction in ligatures (letters joined together) from previous cursives.

As a scribe you would also need to utilize wood for permanent records. Wood tallies were rectangular and used similarly as chirographs as agreement between two parties, including receipt for items or obligations for payment. Notches were cut in the rectangular piece and the piece was split down the middle lengthwise after the information about names and business was printed, and each party was given a piece. The interlocking halves were used to prevent forgery. Wooden tallies were more convenient than parchment to make and to store. As a scribe you would not be completely involved, since the special expertise of a tally cutter was needed. Indeed, an era of sub-specialization! Tallies were the foundation of the royal financial system of the 12th century and expanded to use by accountants. They would be used in England up to the early 19th century.

Perhaps instead of being a scribe you would prefer to deal in parchment! Certainly specialists were needed to produce parchment from sheepskin primarily, but goat, rabbit or squirrel skin would do. Calf skin was the finest from which vellum was produced. Scraping would decrease the differences in appearance, but the vellum from calf skin was the non plus ultra for parchment. Turning a skin into parchment required thorough cleansing and dehairing. After washing, the skin was dried on a frame so that it would not shrink. When thoroughly cleaned and dried, the parchment was removed from the frame and cut into sheets. Each sheet was folded in two to form a bifolium. Several sheets folded together would form a quire- the scribe's basic writing unit.

That parchment, in contrast to papyrus, allowed a long lasting permanent record was not lost on the medieval administrators, monastics, and scribes. Many of the parchment documents were for perpetual remembrance, for posterity or addressed to God, not to contemporaries. Monastic documents reflected not necessarily the realities but what would reflect the best light of the situation. Charters could be created de novo to alter the situation of the conveyance in the best possible light. These charters could thus support legal claims on property.

Incidentally, what about paper? Paper was scarce and largely imported up to the beginning of the 14th century. At the time, some paper records were sent from Italy to Edward I's bankers and early paper records were being made in England's seaports.

Hopefully, you would have some knowledge of Old English, Norman French, and Medieval Latin, but Latin would get you through most of your tasks. Although some Latin was used in written records in the late Anglo-Saxon period, the use of the vernacular (Old English) was largely prevalent. Possibly because of this, William the Conqueror injected his own vernacular (Norman French) into written laws, largely replacing Old English. Thus, the use of language became more complex after the Conquest, with Latin, French, and English competing with one another as written languages. Even Hebrew was used most specifically in documents concerning Jews, who arrived in the 12th century. However, several noted Christian biblical scholars knew Hebrew including Roger Bacon.

In the 13th Century, in England, written language in order of use was Latin, French, English and Hebrew. French was the oral language of the gentry and the royal court. Latin was the language of much of the written records. The forms of Latin varied, from simple Latin in monastic writings, to an ornate and antiquarian form of the rhetoricians, to the precise legal

language of Domesday Book and Magna Carta, to the songs of minstrels. Old English was the predominant language of those outside the gentry. Hebrew was of course confined to the Jews before they were expelled in the latter 13th century. The knights and landowners wrote in French, the scholastics and royal administration and monasteries in Latin. However, in the late 12th century, the literary written language increasingly was French. It was the language of romances (the word of course refers to the language). Romantic literature was written mostly in French, frequently commissioned by a great lady, concerning a quest in some Celtic location. Although vernacular authors at the time were still considered vulgar and often apologized in their writing for using French instead of Latin, King Henry II commissioned histories of England and France in French. Latin continued as the language of literacy but inroads were being made in French as well as English. At the time, if the King wished to contact an official in the countryside he would have spoken French to his commissioners, had the message written in Latin, and read out to the official in English. Thus there was a considerable disconnect between oral and written language in response to a specific issue. In a court, the oral language for reading a decision would be English, based upon plea rolls written in French or Latin.

Beginning in the mid-13th century, French began to replace Latin in writs and petitions. The court Year Books, beginning in the late 13th century, recorded conversations in French. Magna Carta was officially issued in Latin but following a baronial rebellion in the mid-12th century several decades after Magna Carta, proclamations were sent out in the King's name in English and French as well as Latin. Thus, although the common language of the people continued to be forms of Old English, written language was derived from the monastic and royal authority and influenced by social status. The development of written documents spread asymptotically. For example, an English representative from the papal curia received an annuity from the King and

bishop of London. He wanted to be sure of the perpetuity of his annuity so that he needed two charters from the King (Henry II) and his heir, two from the bishop, others from sheriffs and the Exchequer, several official transcripts, and several from papal ministers, with an additional letter to his agent. The annuity was £ 20, a large amount for the time.

Language varied in the undertaking of inquests. They may have been issued in Latin, after a draft in French, but the replies might be made orally in English. Written responses in parchment were rarely in English. Clerks in England from the Archbishops on down were quite familiar with Latin as a written language. Latin was the language of record in Continental Europe and after the Conquest began to be used for business purposes, although Old English continued to be of some use in royal writs.

The Domesday Book, William I's survey of land, animals and people in England in 1086, perhaps was initially more symbolic than practical. It may have been derived from charters brought to William from throughout the land and kept in various treasuries, to be consulted more actively in the following two centuries. The charter form was quite old but became more similar in form as their number increased after the Conquest. Most of these charters initially listed property rights over land. What was important about Domesday was its novelty in a royal archive of an administrative document. Although the Domesday Book of the late 11th century set a standard for comprehensive surveys, but rarely consulted before the 13th century, it should be recalled that Edward I developed a Quo Warranto Survey to record property rights across the realm. Both served to record rights of the King and his feudatories. As with the Domesday survey, administrators from each county had to list all towns, hamlets and tenements in order to settle questions of ownership. Nonetheless, exceptions were still being made for property conveyances made before the start of the reign of Richard I by oral avowals.

As the 12th century was approached, with the reign of Henry I, remarkable changes began in the spread of writing, the use of archives and documents, more formal approaches to ensuring the legality of such documents, and the use of written record through the social orders.

Between the Norman Conquest and the beginning of the 14th century, various types of records proliferated, primarily in parchment or some in wood and later the institution of paper. These included official documents or monastic writings such as charters, chirographs, rolls, writs, letters, chronicles, registers, summas, and liturgical documents. For the lay public, stories, and songs were developed in manuscript or book form. Charters were used for safeguarding property. Charters were in effect public letters issued by donors concerning property. Chirographs recorded agreements between parties. Agreements included diverse objectives including loans, marriage settlements, or matters of state such as international treaties. Each party received a copy, with a seal of the other party. A third copy was kept in an archive. Copies were cut in half so that alignment could be checked in case of a question of forgery. Certificates were public statements by individuals that could possibly be an early form of current Facebook comments. These were individual statements including testimonials and notifications addressed to the public. Letters were a form of statement for posterity composed with style and not necessarily sent to addressees. Writs were forms of written command from one person to another brief and direct, most commonly composed by the king. The responses encompassed petitions to the king or other forms of redress. Memoranda of fines found their way into pipe rolls of the Exchequer, who kept track of the royal fisc. These pleas had previously been communicated orally. As a scribe you would have to be quite versatile in your handling of each type of communication.

Over the 12th and 13th centuries, executive orders to sheriffs and bailiffs were increasingly put in writing. King's letters from Henry I to Henry II increased six-fold. This was part of the expansion in written records, with attestations by seals, reaching all social classes that created a revolution that anticipated the use of the printing press. By the early 14th century, under Edward I, royal writs were being distributed to every countryside. Charters as titles to properties proceeded through the 11th through the 14th centuries from royal and monasterial titles of property down through the knightly class and finally to the laity. By that time, even some serfs were required to have seals authenticating documents of property rights. By the early 14th century, documents had virtually completely replaced oral recollections by the learned as legitimizing property rights.

By the way, how do historians determine the volume of documents from the period? With the record of sealing wax used as recorded by the Chancery! The proliferation of documents in the English Chancery in the 13th century can be determined by the pounds of wax used per week, about 3 ½ pounds in the first quarter of the century and almost 32 pounds per week forty years later. Waxing forth, indeed!

The most detailed dialogues were found in the Year Books, reports of court cases, describing the comments made in court, the facts of the case, the points of law, usually in Latin or French, although the litigants and lawyers may have spoken in English. Unlike plea rolls that described the procedural stages of cases, the Year Books served as educational material for law students and lawyers. The Year Books, begun at the end of the 12th century as a continuing series of records, served as stimuli for continuous record keeping by other milieus. However, monastic houses had their own continuing records as chronicles, listing events throughout the year, including actions of kings, deaths of notables, and memoranda related to the monastery. Because

of the uncertainty of monasterial property rights after the Norman Conquest and especially during the civil wars of Stephen and Matilda following Henry I's reign, records were kept in the form of cartularies, used to justify the origins of deeds and property rights if challenged by royal authority. Registers of outgoing documents were kept by the Exchequer or by the Chancery for royal letters. Although many of the documents described were in the form of individual parchment rolls or documents, increasingly documents were bound between covers. These could be considered books but some books contained a variety of documents unrelated to one another such as discourses, cooking recipes, glossaries, and treatises.

As indicated previously, the use of seals on documents became increasingly important as authentication of records. Seals were circular waxed disks embossed with identification of the owner attached to the document by strips of parchment. A seal could be used by the possessor of documents and familiar with their use. The owner's name was engraved by hand on the seal template. By the 13th century, this was a common way for authentication of property conveyance by laypersons. By the early 14th century, even serfs were using this means of authentication.

Books as such were uncommon, at least in individual ownership up to at least the 15th century. In the 13th century, great scholars might have 50 to 100 books at most. Church libraries might contain not only bibles and liturgical works, but also histories and Latin classics. With the upsurge of scholasticism in the 12th and 13th centuries came the Summa, (viz Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas). The summae analyzed contrary statements and served as encyclopedias of focused scholastic issues. They most commonly dealt with theological or legal issues. Summae were highly organized and dealt with authoritative discourses, for example on drafting charters, conducting law courts, and financial accounting.

Books were expensive and the early universities needed to supply books for students at cheap rates. Most of these books were in law or theology, not contemporary romances or belles-lettres. The book stationer supplying books had to receive permission from the university, after which the university would approve the book and set the price of sale.

By the end of the 13th century, secular book trade was well established in the University cities of Oxford, Bologna, Paris and several other university centers in France and Italy. In Paris, Franciscan and Dominican friars collaborated in the design and distribution of portable bibles. Thirteenth century bibles were illustrated with scenes at the beginning of each book for decoration as well as indicating to the novice reader of recognition of the particular text.

Although monasteries produced liturgical books, they were mostly forbidden to copy and produce secular works such as law books. During the two centuries before the development of printing, independent booksellers increased in number.

Above all in terms of holy writing were the liturgical books, records that reflected the words of God. When we use the word script or scripture, we are using a term that originally referred to such writings. Perhaps the most impressive of medieval records were the gospel books, psalters, texts of psalms and books of hours, many designed for the laity with brilliant illuminations. Many of these texts were familiar due to repetition of material in churches. The books of hours served as portable manuals of prayer for laypersons.

Medieval books were composed of parchment, folded into folios to produce leaves of several sizes, two large leaves making four pages, and four small leaves making eight pages. Books were bound on wooden boards covered with leather, sometimes encrusted with jewels. The quires were sewn with needle and thread into supports bound to the book covers. Books,

originally rather large, became smaller in the 13th century, with compressed script on thinner parchment. One reason was the increasing use by students and other laypersons as well as monks who would find it easy to carry around books in pouches and to read for meditation, as opposed to the use of books as ornamentation left on a bookstand with elaborate ornamentation exposed. These smaller books consisted of bibles, textbooks, and manuals. Even some of these smaller books, especially bibles, had elaborate ornamentation. By the end of the 13th century, books were replacing rolls as records, especially with bishop's registers, bringing them into conformity with papal and other continental practices.

Although books were considered precious objects, items of importance, however, were kept in liturgical books. Jews used prayer book leaves for recording memoranda, frequently in the Arabic language with Hebrew letters. Charters might be saved in sacred books or shrines. Although liturgical books might be kept in the monastery church, other books might be located close in a cloister chest for private reading by the monks.

With the proliferation of records and books, libraries began to be developed as archives for book storage. At the same time, monastic cataloging of books was initiated without necessarily indicating their location primarily for the use of the librarian. It was the Dominican friars who initiated in the late 13th century the current concept of how a library should be run. The librarian was to be responsible for safe keeping of stored books, with knowledge of their location, keeping them secure and waterproof, with adequate ventilation, and with location by subject. Most commonly used books were chained in a reference section, whereas less commonly used books could be loaned out with the loaner's name recorded. One important task of the librarian was the issuing of a book to each friar on the first Monday of Lent. For the next year each friar was to read passages of the book to himself speaking the words and contemplating their meaning.

Unlike the friars and monastic houses, the King did not own many books. King John was the first royal to use books since the Norman Conquest. Subsequent kings may have had a smattering of liturgical texts and romances. The first royal central archive may have been the Winchester treasury, which held the Domesday survey remains since the time of William I. Documents were later removed and disbursed to portable chests that were carried among royal palaces, the Tower of London, hunting lodges and fortresses, at the King's disposal. The Domesday Book was thus kept as well as charters. Moveable feasts indeed! The initial definition of thesaurus was treasure kept in these chests. This procedure was carried out throughout the early 13th century but because of the proliferation of records, accumulations prevented adequate portability. Finally, during Henry III's reign, documents began to be stored in archives at Westminster, The Tower of London, and the New Temple (London home of the Templars). Since the chief custodians were Templars, after the Knights Templars were dissolved by papal decree in 1312, concerns about adequate archiving and security led to centralization in a final archival repository, the White Chapel in the Tower of London in 1320. In the hinterland, some archiving might have been undertaken by sheriffs who had collections of rolls.

In the 13th century, royal archiving had not reached a point of efficiency that allowed rapid access to documents except when they were of recent origin and the date of issue was known. Such searches would be accomplished for documents affecting property claims or transcripts of litigation involving the royal court. Some information was accessible from monastic records in cartularies and chronicles, since the monasteries were always watchful about royal court proceedings. For example, one book from monastic records in the 13th century consisted of a collection of 90 official royal documents including pipe rolls, commentary on the Domesday Book, and writs and plea rolls of Edward I.

Books at that period rarely had tables of contents, and readers would try to memorize locations of content using images of the lettering and ornaments. An image of a pointed index finger at a certain location would quickly allow the reader to find his place. Indices began to be alphabetized by the early 14th century. However, medieval elitists considered alphabetical order on names inappropriate to their sense of hierarchy. This view was prevalent for centuries. As late as the 18th century, Yale College listed its students not by alphabetical order but by the status of their families. However, the Franciscans and Dominicans developed alphabetical systemization of the documents in their repositories.

Thus, the revolution in writing between the 11th and 14th centuries in England was primarily the establishment of permanent written records and archives, and the dissemination of writing into all levels of society. This became the substrate for the use of the printing press. Although many of the medieval arts of writing were dissipated by the new era of printing, with paper replacing parchment, nonetheless, as previously indicated, wooden talleys were still used in England up to the early 19th century and calligraphy on parchment still persists as an art. Of course, the Latin mass has persisted and Latin and French phrases persist in law records. Many medical terms remain in Latin. And of course, wedding rings are still exchanged as symbols of vows.

Now that you have partaken in your week as scribe, I hope that you have improved your Latin, your stylus-manship and have waxed forth to more recent times, where the finger is mightier than the quill.

Sources

1. MT Clanchy. *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066-1307*. 2nd Edition. Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge, USA, 1993.
2. R. Clemens and T. Graham. *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London. 2007
3. H.J. Chaytor. *From Script to Print. An Introduction to Medieval Literature*. Cambridge, 1945.