

JOHN BANYS'S NOTEBOOK

Contents

This is a small (4 3/4in by 3 3/4in) 90-page paper and parchment notebook amongst the Gresley papers (D75/4/25/25) in Derbyshire Record Office, New St., Matlock, Derbyshire. Badly damaged by damp and mould, its outer leaf seems to be lost. Surviving contents include:

- pp. 1-29* *Latin treatise on chiromancy.*
This appears to be a version of *The John of Seville Chiromancy*, known in other manuscripts from the 15th century onwards.
- pp. 30-33* *Drawings of hands* illustrating the preceding treatise
[p.34: blank]
- pp.35-50* *Latin treatise on physiognomy*
This is the section on physiognomy, in the version of Philip of Tripoli, from the *Pseudo-Aristotle's Secretum Secretorum*, an extremely popular medieval text often associated with *The John of Seville Chiromancy*
- pp.51-53* *List of dance titles, with number of dancers required*
- pp.54-70* *Choreographies in English of 26 dances*
- pp. 72-79* *Dance melodies*
- pp. 80-85* *Latin prayers*
- [pp. 86-90: blank]*

Watermark

A watermark in the form of a Gothic y has been identified in the manuscript (p 45, p 51). This is found in papers produced in North-Eastern France and used throughout Western Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century, with most of the known examples dating from the 1470s and 1480s. Stocks of paper might remain unused for years and so only approximate dates can be inferred. A 1458 manuscript with this watermark and very similar in physical makeup to John Banys's notebook is to be found in the Bibliotheque Nationale (BN lat.16517); the Gothic y watermark also appears in Paston letters between the dates 1475 and 1483; a similar watermark occurs in *The Kingis Quair* manuscript (Bodleian Library MS. Arch. Selden B. 24), datable to between 1489 and 1513.

Origins and purpose

The name *Johanes Banys* is written at the end of the text on p.66. Inside the back cover, the name *Johanes Banis* also appears, together with memoranda including *'Item to remember to sende a letter to mr rauff shyrlley of stanton for a writing concer[n]ing the gyff of the parsonage of saint [blank]. 'Stanton' is probably Staunton Harold in Leicestershire which Sir Ralph Shirley (d. 1466) acquired through his marriage (by 1423) to Margaret, daughter and heiress of Thomas Staunton. Ralph's son John (d. 1486) moved there from the family seat in Shirley near Ashbourne, although the family continued to maintain its extensive estates in Derbyshire.*

The Shirleys, Finderns and Gresleys were probably part of the same social circle in South Derbyshire in the late medieval and early Tudor period. John Findern witnessed a grant of land to William Sherle in 1476. Thomas Findern (fl. 1505-1525) married Margaret Dethick of Newhall near Swadlincote; her sister, Dorothy, was the wife of Thomas Gresley of Drakelow.

The Shirley family is associated with several manuscripts indicative of shared literary and cultural interests amongst the gentry of South Derbyshire in the later 15th century. Probably the best known of these is the so-called *Findern Anthology* (Cambridge University Library MS. Ff. 1.6). Compiled over a long period of time by many hands, including some named women, its contents include copies of popular verse works by Chaucer, Hoccleve and Lydgate, love lyrics, scraps of doggerel, various signatures and memoranda, as well as inventories of bedlinen, table linen and pots and pans at Findern. Another manuscript, a copy of the English *Stimulus Amoris* by Walter Hilton, includes a coat of arms of the Shirley family (BL MS Harley 2254); a prose version of the *Brut* chronicle, c.1440-1460, now in Pennsylvania State University Library, is said to have 'erased notes' of births of children to John Shirley (1535-1570) of Staunton Harold; and in St John's College, Cambridge, there is a book of hours (MS. 264) given as a present by Margaret Beaufort *'moder to the kyng'* [Henry VII] to *'my good lady Shyrley'*. Family tradition identifies the recipient as Anne, daughter of Sir Henry Vernon of Haddon Hall, who married about 1496, as his second wife, Sir Ralph Shirley (d.1517). However, Ralph also had a child by his first marriage named Anne. In the Findern Anthology, the name *'Anne Schyrley'* in a late 15th century hand appears at the top of f.118r., a text of Sir Richard Roos's *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy'*.

Members of South Derbyshire gentry families who copied famous poems in manuscript and were familiar with the latest literary fashions may well also have employed a highly-skilled and knowledgeable dancing master, John Banys. Interest in an indigenous tradition of dance, evidence of which survives in Banys's choreographies, dance titles and music, would also be consistent with their practical support for transmission of English vernacular poetry. Furthermore, the relative stability of the later 15th century encouraged courtly accomplishments such as dancing. Peace was largely established from 1471, when Edward IV recaptured his throne, until his death in 1483 and the accession of Henry VII in 1485 seems to have

stimulated new artistic activity of many kinds – music, drama, choreography, literature, and the visual arts. Subsequently, the lavish festivities which accompanied the wedding of Arthur, Prince of Wales and Catherine of Aragon in 1501 would be well known to landed families in Derbyshire despite the distance from their homes to the capital.

Although nothing is yet known of John Banys beyond his name, his notebook should be considered in the context of other late 15th century compilations for professional purposes such as texts for minstrels (e.g. BL Sloane MS 2593 or Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet e.1) or songbooks (e.g. Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden B. 26, Trinity College Cambridge MS 1230 or Cambridge University Library Add MS 5943). In the inclusion of Latin prayers it resembles other personal collections of the time such as Canon John Gysborn's early 16th century commonplace book (BL Sloane MS 1584).

Margaret O'Sullivan

County and Diocesan Archivist, Derbyshire Record Office, County Hall, Matlock, Derbyshire, England, DE4 3AG

© Derbyshire County Council 1999

References

Beadle, R & Owen, AEB (eds), *The Findern Manuscript Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6*, facsimile edition, London, 1978

Burnett, Charles *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages esp. Chiromancy supplement: the principal Latin texts on chiromancy extant in the Middle Ages*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1996, pp. 1-29

Fallows, David 'The Gresley Dance Collection, c.1500', *Research Chronicle of the Royal Musical Association* vol.29 (1996) pp. 1-20

Harris, Kate 'The Origins and Make-up of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6.', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* vol. 8 (1983) pp. 299-333

Keiser, GR 'MS Rawlinson A 393: Another Findern Manuscript?' *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* vol. 7 (1980) pp. 445-448

Neville, Jennifer 'Dance in early Tudor England: an Italian connection?' *Early Music* vol. XXVI/2 (May, 1998) pp.230-244

Robins, RH 'The Findern Anthology', *PMLA*, vol. LXIX (1954), pp. 510-642

Wright, Susan M *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, 1983