

Chroniclers of History

**Large print
guide**

Case outside the Weston Gallery:

St Albans scriptorium manuscript fragment (St Albans Museums collection)

The manuscripts in this exhibition have been borrowed from across the country and brought to St Albans where many of them were created. Whilst working on the exhibition we were able to acquire this fragment for our own museum collection.

The text is from the *Life of St Martin of Tours* by Sulpicius Severus and it was copied by 'Scribe B' of the St Albans Abbey scriptorium during the abbacy of Ralph Gubiun (1146-1151).

Scribe B's writing is distinguished by the elegance and flamboyance of his hand, which is highly disciplined and with very distinctive flourishes. His role was often that of the master of the scriptorium, taking charge over crucial texts such as charters as well as extensively correcting texts.

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St Albans Museums & Galleries Trust

The stages of painting an illumination letter

Patricia Lovett MBE

This letter B is copied from psalm 1 in the Westminster Psalter, *Beatus vir* (Blessed is the man).

Professional calligrapher and illuminator Patricia Lovett has created it to show the stages of adding gold and painting an illuminated letter.

From the top:

1. Outline in minimum
2. Gesso applied to raise the gold from the surface
3. Gold applied

4. Base colours applied
5. Lower half painted in full.

You can find out more about these stages and the tools and equipment used to create illuminated manuscripts in the gallery.

Inside the Weston Gallery - starting from the cases on the left as you enter the gallery and going clockwise around the room:

Introduction

During the medieval period the Abbey of St Albans grew in wealth and status. Well-funded and organised, the abbey was involved not just in the spiritual life of the town. It controlled large tracts of land making it a major economic power, while its abbot was lord of much of the region.

Among the functions of the abbey in the days before printing, was the production of books. Within a scriptorium existing works could be copied, or new ones created. Religious works featured heavily, but the monks' interests spread into many other areas – science, philosophy and history amongst them.

Chronicles became particularly popular. Histories that recounted the ages of man from ancient times until the chroniclers' present served as records of the distant

past, provided moral lessons and promoted the position of the church in general and the chronicler's own monastery in particular, recording its rights and privileges.

From the twelfth century, St Albans gradually built a national reputation for the quality of its chroniclers. A series of monks recorded events affecting the church and state until the fifteenth century. As one of the greatest monasteries in medieval England, with a geographical position that placed it close to the events of the royal court and those who frequented it, the abbey benefitted from access to eyewitness accounts from many important individuals.

This alone would have made the chronicles produced at St Albans important, but the monastery was also blessed with a number of particularly capable and talented chroniclers whose interests and abilities elevated them to amongst the finest in the land. This included in particular the classically trained Thomas Walsingham whose works heavily influenced English history, while the inquisitive and opinionated Matthew Paris wrote extensively on local, national and

international matters and often provided a very unflattering portrait of those who he considered to be abusing their power.

Image 1:

Socrates at a writing desk with Plato looking over his shoulder.

MS Ashmole 304 f31v. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Image 2:

Alban being led to his execution, drawn by Matthew Paris.

MS 177 f36r. The Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

The town and the abbey

The town of St Albans grew up around the monastery, the townsfolk providing services and goods to the monks. After the abbot gained control of the old Roman town of Verulamium and diverted Watling Street up Holywell Hill to the monastery, the town prospered as a trading centre. It gained a market and the promotion of the abbey as a centre of pilgrimage and royal visits saw the town's status also grow.

However, the town of St Albans remained firmly under the abbot's control. As both grew in wealth and status, the town sought greater freedom from what it saw as a greedy and restricting authority, while the abbey sought to maintain its hard-won privileges from what it saw as baseless challenges to long-standing obligations. The large number of dependant priories and cells also meant that many ecclesiastical posts were filled by non-locals. The close familial links with the community that helped ease social unrest elsewhere were often lacking in St Albans.

The abbey also faced challenges from the Crown, and neighbouring barons. Hertfordshire was a convenient base, away from the pressures of the city but close enough to remain in contact with events there. While royal visits conferred status, royal palaces established at Dunstable and Kings Langley sometimes claimed abbey estates as theirs, leading to expensive litigation. In contrast, the town grew wealthy from visits and trade with these estates – in 1353 there were 9 tailors, 6 drapers and 2 spicers operating within the town.

Image 1:

John of Wheathampstead. While many of the abbots seem to have been locals, many monks were natives of Norfolk or Durham, meaning wealthy local families were frozen out of the monastery.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f27r. The British Library.

Image 2:

The earliest surviving detailed map of St Albans from 1634 shows the town consisting of three main streets –

Holywell Hill, Chequer Street/St Peters Street and Fishpool Street, with the centre based closely around the monastery. The earlier town would have followed a similar layout as the roads were already well established by the medieval period.

Hare map

St Albans – the premier Benedictine Monastery in England

Despite obscure origins, St Albans Abbey grew in power and prestige to such an extent that it could justifiably claim this title. Its success was down to a number of factors.

At a day's travel from London, St Albans was a convenient distance for the king and his retinue to visit regularly. The royal household either stayed at the abbey or one of the royal residencies at King's Langley, Berkhamsted and Dunstable. Their presence encouraged other nobles to also visit.

St Albans being the burial place of the first English martyr encouraged pilgrimages from all levels of society - there were many inns and monastery lodging houses in the town. Paris states the guest stables at St Albans Abbey would accommodate 300 horses.

The monastery worked hard on gaining and maintaining statuses and rights. It gained independence from the diocese of Lincoln under the Papacy of Nicholas Breakspear, and the Liberty of St Albans, an area free

from subjection to any bishop and certain royal rules was also established; Breakspear's successor, Pope Alexander III granted 43 further privileges.

The abbey owned land across the county including manors in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, making it one of the wealthiest in the country. By 1300 the abbey had nine cells – priories following St Albans' rule - spread from Redbourn to Tynemouth in Northumbria. In the early fourteenth century, St Albans also became patron of two nunneries at Sopwell and St Mary de Pre. No other monastery had more dependencies.

Finally, the monastery had a succession of capable and well-connected influential abbots, often with links to the royal family, working to improve its status. While it was a monastery devoted to the rule of St Benedict, St Albans was also an economic and political powerhouse.

Image 1:

The monastery's lands stretched from Rickmansworth in the west to Barnet in the east and Sandridge in the north.

Cotton MS Nero D I f181v and f182r. The British Library.

Image 2:

One of the abbey's employees in the *Book of Benefactors* was William Burton a legal expert, who 'preserved the rights of this church undamaged for 30 years and more'.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f105r. The British Library.

Case label:

The religious life of the monks was made possible through the abbey's possession of agricultural estates, commercial and residential buildings and parish churches from which income could be raised. These documents relate to this economic side of the abbey's existence - grants of property to the church (1,2); the granting of the right to the monks to hunt game on their land (3) and the substitution of a corrody – a pension, funded by the monastery to be assigned to a royal nominee – with a grant of land on the abbey's estates at Abbot's Langley (4).

Abbey charters. St Albans Cathedral.

The Importance of St Albans

The location of St Albans so close to the capital of London often proved either a curse or blessing to the town, with economic, social or political factors acting to enhance or detract from the town's status and providing a boost or a drag on its development.

By the medieval period, St Albans was benefitting politically from the proximity of London. The king and his court travelled regularly around the country for baronial meetings, matters of state and diplomacy and for pleasure.

The abbey, as the largest local landowner, controller of the town, and an established centre of learning came to be closely involved with affairs of state and its abbots had access to the king. Chroniclers such as Matthew Paris received first-hand accounts of political and military events through their contact with members of the court, knights, lords and diplomats.

The benefits of easy access to London, while also being removed from it meant other areas also prospered, becoming rivals to the abbey. By the early twelfth

century Henry I had established a royal palace at Dunstable which royalty continued to visit until the fourteenth century. In the thirteenth Century, Eleanor of Castille, wife of Edward I built another royal palace at Langley and the Plantagenet monarchs made King's Langley as it became known, a major seat of government and often celebrated Christmas there.

Image 1:

Lying an easy day's travel north of London on the old Roman road of Watling street which now formed the main route to the north, St Albans was at the heart of medieval government.

Cotton MS Claudius D VI!1 f12v. The British Library.

Image 2:

The monastery was well connected with the elite: Henry Percy Earl of Northumberland was a supporter of the abbey's Tynemouth Cell.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f111r. The British Library.

The town mills

As the town of St Albans grew in size and wealth, its inhabitants sought independence from the abbot who, as Lord of the Liberty of St Albans, controlled its courts and demanded labour services and taxes. The abbey's right to mulcture – a fee paid by the tenants for the use of the abbey's mills to grind corn - was especially unpopular, as the tenants had their own hand mills freely available.

In 1274 the abbey confiscated the hand mills of tenants who had been using them in defiance of the abbey's rights. The townspeople challenged this in court at Westminster, but lost. Tempers were running high again in 1324, when townspeople attacked the abbey and broke into the treasury, removing documents in an attempt to deny the abbot the legal justification of his lordship.

Three years later more rioting broke out and the abbey was besieged for ten days until the Hertford militia were called out to restore order. The town's demands were familiar - the right to pasture cattle on abbey land and

fish in abbey waters, a jury of townsmen to judge minor court cases rather than the abbot, and of course the right to use hand mills – essentially all the benefits of a chartered borough. Later negotiations saw the king find in the town's favour on all points except the hand mills.

The town's independence did not last. The next abbot, Richard of Wallingford sought to restore the abbey's control. Making fresh appeals to the king, he launched a series of legal attacks forcing the town to give up its charter. The still-illegal hand mills he had broken up and set into the floor of his parlour.

Image 1:

Abbot Wallingford used his position and connections to curtail the town's independence. Despite his unpopularity with the townsfolk, Wallingford inherited a bankrupt monastery and organised strict control of both the town and his monks in order to restore its fortunes.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f20r. The British Library.

Image 2:

Nigel the Miller (third from top) from the *Book of Benefactors*.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f96r. The British Library.

Image 3:

The multure tax meant that the townspeople had to pay for the abbey's mills to grind their corn into flour even though they had their own millstones for the purpose.

1980.950 millstone

Case label:

Charter of Henry II confirming the right of St Albans Abbey to full authority over its property, free from interference from the Crown dating to 1154-1163. A century later when King Henry III granted the town of St Albans the right to an independent judiciary, rather than the abbot's own officials, the abbot tried to annul it and shortly afterwards, the constitution of the town was changed.

Charter of Henry II. VIII/B/60. Hertfordshire Archives and
Local Studies.

Thomas Walsingham

Probably born in Norfolk around 1340, Walsingham was a monk of St Albans by 1364 and spent most of his career running the scriptorium, apart from brief spell in charge of the abbey's daughter house of Wymondham between 1394-1396. On returning to St Albans, Walsingham held no further office, spending the next 25 years in study and writing.

Like his predecessors Wendover and Paris, Walsingham recorded contemporary events, both in the abbey itself (continuing the *Gesta Abbatum* – Deeds of the Abbots) and in the wider world in his *Greater Chronicle* and his history of Normandy, *Ypodigma Neustriae*. He also compiled the *Book of Benefactors*, a record of gifts to the abbey from its foundation until the present.

Walsingham's other writings show the breadth of his learning and contacts. His work on musical notation was the first by an English monk – he had also been the abbey's precentor, or music master. Walsingham was also an exceptional classical scholar noted for his knowledge of classical writings, and produced studies of

Alexander the Great, the Trojan Wars and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, drawing widely from both classical and medieval authors. Some of his sources were little-known in England and suggest that the abbey's library was still very well stocked after 1350.

Walsingham rarely mentions himself in his works and there are only six mentions of him in the abbey records. He is thought to have died at St Albans Abbey around 1422, aged over 80.

Image 1:

Guidonian hand: a learning aid for singers. Different notes are represented by different parts of the hand. A music master would point to the parts of the hand and students would sing their notes in order.

Lansdowne 763 f6. The British Library

Image 2:

As a classical scholar, Walsingham was without parallel in fourteenth century England. This page from his *Archana deorum*, a commentary on Ovid's

Metamorphoses shows Cerberus and Charon the ferryman.

Lansdowne 728 f160v. The British Library.

Thomas Walsingham's chronicle

Thomas Walsingham began his chronicles around a century after the death of Matthew Paris, when the traditions of chronicling were dying out, yet Walsingham chose to take up the work of his predecessors. He continued the history of St Albans Abbey begun by Paris and spent most of his career running the scriptorium.

Walsingham also wrote his own *Chronica Maiora*. Its title is a clear sign that he saw it as a continuation of Paris' earlier work. Walsingham's chronicle was similarly based on first-hand accounts and like Paris he vilified those that threatened the abbey's position, although he is generally less biased than Paris in his comments and is careful to accurately record the key historical details.

Unlike Paris, Walsingham wrote with a wider audience in mind than simply the monks of the abbey and intended for his work to influence later writers. He also worked in isolation on his histories, so as to avoid incorporating other sources directly into his work, relying instead on his own talents and contacts. Walsingham also wrote prose in an authentic classical style with moments of

high drama, passionate speeches and high and low comedy, with characters paraphrasing details of key documents that Paris would have copied out as separate articles.

As well as being of literary merit, his chronicles are important historical sources for the reigns of Richard II & Henry V, the rise of John Wycliffe and the Peasant's Revolt and its effects on St Albans. As a result, Walsingham's works stand apart from the earlier medieval chroniclers of England, of whom he was the last great exemplar, and prepare the way for the 'Renaissance' historians who followed.

Image 1:

Richard II & John of Gaunt from Walsingham's *Book of Benefactors*. Like Paris, Walsingham revised his works later in life. His scathing accounts of John of Gaunt, whom he had been bitterly opposed to at first are notably softened later. Sections on the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV & V also appear to be edited at the end of each king's reign.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f7r. The British Library.

Image 2:

Ironically for such an influential writer, few manuscript copies of Walsingham's work now survive. His *Chronica* is spread in different sections across a number of manuscripts.

Royal MS 13 E IX f177. The British Library.

Case label:

Thomas Walsingham's scholarly knowledge shows in his chronicle. These pages include Walsingham's account of the Battle of Agincourt (1415) which describes the scene using the language and imagery of classical Latin poetry, including phrases taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora*. MS Bodleian 462 f314v-315r. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

The *Liber Benefactorum*

Compiled by Thomas Walsingham, the *Liber Benefactorum*, or Golden Book of St Albans was a high-quality book designed to be kept at the altar and perhaps play a role in ceremonies. Walsingham employed fellow monk, William Wylum to write the script, while a professional illustrator, Alan Strayler provided many of the 230 plus illustrations.

Professional scribes and illustrators were often employed at abbeys by the fourteenth century. Illustrators were often hired in as necessary, although they could be difficult to attract as other work was available. Strayler includes himself amongst the benefactors, noting that he donated the cost of his paints to the abbey, but he did not produce all the illustrations – eleven different artists are represented, so the abbey may have turned to other (lesser) talents when he was unavailable.

The *Liber Benefactorum* lists all the known benefactors of St Albans Abbey, living and dead, starting with kings, then queens, popes, bishops and lay benefactors. While

the paintings favour the elite, a number of lesser laypeople whose donations are relatively modest are also listed and sometimes illustrated. People often hold miniature replicas of what they bequeathed. The list gives an impression of St Albans as a lively and sophisticated town where the great and the good might be seen to spend time, when not in London or attending court.

Many of the abbey's wealthier benefactors guaranteed the abbey various privileges and lands, meaning the *Benefactorum* also served as a record of the monastery's freedoms and rights. There is also occasional commentary on the goodness (or otherwise) of the benefactors.

Image 1:

King Offa, the historic founder of the abbey at the start of the *Book of Benefactors*.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f3v. The British Library.

Image 2:

Nobles, holding charters donate land to the abbey. From the top: Egelbertus, Wulsinus, Wulfsinus, Aelfstanus, Minister Wulsgarus and Matildis.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f90v. The British Library.

Thomas Walsingham and the Peasant's Revolt

Thomas Walsingham lived through the Peasants Revolt and covered it in great detail. The activities of the rebels and monks and the eventual outcome take up nearly 100 pages of his chronicle providing a level of detail lacking in other accounts.

The national revolt had its foundations in the Black Death and the resulting economic repression, but it was three crippling taxes imposed in just six years that brought things to a head. Attempts to collect the final tax in 1381 led to armed resistance. Rebels in East Anglia and the Home Counties marched on London, demanding the heads of the king's counsellors, lower taxes, the abolition of serfdom, and the removal of the church's great land holdings in order to restore what they saw as their traditional rights. Properties were burnt and members of the government killed before order was restored.

In contrast, the demands from the rebels of St Albans were specifically for a charter declaring the town's

independence from the abbey and accompanying rights, freeing them from villein status. In particular the abolition of the hated multure tax. The townspeople appear to have taken the opportunity the national uprising created to resolve old grievances. Walsingham records that the townspeople broke into the abbot's parlour and broke up its floor made of old hand mills.

The abbot was forced to hand over old charters which were burnt and to agree to the townspeople's demands, but the uprising was relatively peaceful and there was little bloodshed in St Albans - until the King's reprisals saw 15 of the town's citizens hanged for their part in the uprising.

Walsingham showed no sympathy for the townsfolk, revelling in their defeat, torture and death. For all his education and learning, he shared his brethren's view that those who challenged the rights of the church deserved no mercy.

Image 1:

Donors to the abbey from the *Book of Benefactors*;
Walsingham describes the rebels as ‘fools’, ‘rascals’ and
‘peasant riff raff’ although many were educated
townsfolk of considerable means of the type
Walsingham is happy to celebrate here – providing they
support the abbey.

MS 007 f108v. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Image 2:

Gallows outside Bedford Castle. A similar fate awaited
the leaders of the St Albans revolt. When the surviving
townspeople removed the bodies for burial, King
Richard ordered them to dig up and rehang the bodies.
Walsingham notes approvingly ‘the corpses were now
oozing with pus and pullulating with worms’ and that the
citizens were forced to do this to their friends and
colleagues ‘had a certain justice about it’.

MS 016II f64r. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Case label:

The *Book of Benefactors*, compiled by Thomas Walsingham, was largely illustrated by Alan Strayler, a professional artist who would have worked at many different religious institutions or for individual patrons. He included himself in the book as he donated the pigments used in painting the book.

Liber Benefactorum. MS Cotton Nero D VII f108r. The British Library.

The Scriptorium

The first scriptorium at St Albans was built by Paul de Caen between 1077 and 1093. It was enlarged under Abbot Simon in 1173 with professional scribes from outside the Abbey employed to assist in producing manuscripts.

St Albans became one of the most productive of English Benedictine monasteries and books from its scriptorium were highly valued for their quality. During the thirteenth century there were probably four or five monk scribes and a similar number of professional lay artists employed in the scriptorium. Later, as book production declined in the monasteries, both writing and illustration was turned over to non-ecclesiastical professionals.

While scribes seem to have been attached on a permanent basis, most artists were itinerant professionals who travelled wherever their work took them. Other monasteries produced lavishly illuminated service books, but St Albans' fame meant that it was still able to attract talented professionals.

By the fourteenth century, the abbey was buying books produced commercially in London and Oxford, until the revival under Thomas Walsingham. A new scriptorium was built and books were repaired, purchased or written by Walsingham and his scribes. Artists continued to be hired in.

After this late revival, book production within the scriptorium ceased permanently. In 1479 St Albans became the third town after London and Oxford to have a printing press. Its long history of book production was no doubt a factor in this. There was a final burst of activity in the 1530s, when another press under Richard Boreman, last Abbot of St Albans was in operation until 1538.

Image 1:

Abbot Paul de Caen. As well as building the scriptorium the *Book of Benefactors* noted that he left the Abbey 28 volumes, eight Psalters, a book of collects, a book of epistles, a book of the gospels, two texts studded with

gold, silver and jewels and many other books for the choir.

Cotton MS Nero D VII f13v. The British Library

Image 2:

A scribe at his desk. There is some debate about whether Matthew Paris worked in the scriptorium or in isolation apart from it, as apparently did Roger in writing his *Flores Historiarum*.

MS Bodleian 602. The Bodleian Libraries Oxford.

The end of the monasteries

In 1509 King Henry VIII married Catherine of Aragon. Only one of their six children, Mary, lived to adulthood. With Catherine unable to have more children, Henry tried to annul the marriage so he could marry again and conceive a son. This was only possible if the marriage was considered illegal. As Catherine had previously been married to his older brother, Henry sought an annulment on the grounds that the bible stated marrying a sister-in-law was not legal. When the Pope refused, Henry began the process of removing England from the authority of the Catholic Church.

In 1534 the Act of Supremacy declared Henry Supreme Head of the Church of England. The monasteries, whose Catholic faith meant they remained loyal to the Pope were gradually closed down. At the time there were almost 900 religious houses in England. St Albans officially surrendered on December 5th 1539. The last Abbot Richard Boreman and the 39 remaining monks were pensioned off.

The monasteries and their manors were given to Henry's supporters. Sir Richard Lee, whose father was from Sopwell and who at the time held a position in Henry VIII's household, received the monastery grounds and the buildings of the nunnery at Sopwell which he rebuilt into a new home for himself.

Many monks remained in the area as priests. Some, including Boreman apparently returned to live as monks during the rule of the Catholic Queen Mary, in the hope that the abbey would be restored, but Mary's death in 1558 ended any chance of the monastery returning.

Image 1:

The ruins of Sir Richard Lee's house at Sopwell, built on the site of the nunnery.

2006.5346 Sopwell Ruins by Sid Gandrier.

Image 2:

In 1553, the former Abbot, Richard Boreman bought the abbey church on behalf of the townspeople for £400, to

use as the parish church and later founded a grammar school that operated from the lady chapel. The Abbey before 19th century restoration work.

Case label:

The end of monastic life in England began in the 1520s as a series of abbots chosen by Henry VIII began to sell off land owned by the abbey, including the manor of Gorhambury (1).

The abbey's end came on Friday 5 December 1539 when the abbey and its remaining property was surrendered to the King by the last abbot, Richard Boreman (2). Sir Richard Lee bought part of the abbey, but then granted part of this to Boreman (3) who had set up a school in the former Lady Chapel of the abbey church.

Lease of Gorhambury. WARD 2/56/200/1; Abbey Surrender. E 322/208; Richard Lee's release of the monastery. E 40/5264. The National Archives, UK.

The Schoolmaster Printer

In 1479, St Albans became only the third city to operate a printing press, just a few years after William Caxton established a press in London. Who the printer was remains a mystery; he was referred to as 'the schoolmaster printer' by Wynkyn de Worde, the London printer who succeeded Caxton.

The post of schoolmaster would not have been held by a monk and some of the books state that they were printed in the town of St Albans, not the abbey. It is unlikely however, that any printing could be carried out without the approval and possibly even the financial support of the abbey.

From 1479 to 1481, the schoolmaster printer printed six books with a high standard of typesetting and printing in Latin; the first two for grammar school students and the other four for university students, possibly those of Cambridge, which did not have a press itself. The first book printed, the *Elegantiolae*, became the St Albans grammar school's first printed text book and copies were presented to the school by the schoolmaster printer

who, judging from the language and phrases used in the books, was English and probably from the north.

In 1486 two further books were produced in English for a more general audience, with a lower standard of technical skill; because of these differences, some have suggested that they were the work of a different printer.

Image 1:

The schoolmaster printer used the saltire on a shield within his books. This was both the arms of the Abbey and the town.

Modern arms of St Albans including the saltire on a shield

Image 2:

Colour printed page from *The Boke of St Albans or Book of Hawking, Hunting, and Heraldry* the last book printed by the Schoolmaster Printer in 1486.

Boke of St Albans f2b2r. The British Library

Image 3:

It seems likely that the reason for St Albans having a printing press so early was its association with the abbey, whose long and prestigious history of learning, book production and book copying from its scriptorium seems to have provided the right environment for a press in St Albans.

A replica printing press

The Chronicles of England

The first book printed in English by the schoolmaster printer was *The Chronicles of England*, a history of England, from its first discovery and settlement through to the year 1461, describing one hundred rulers of Britain in chronological order. *The chronicles* are a compilation of six earlier histories which were themselves compiled from earlier works. It is chivalric in tone and includes many battle scenes and mythical elements, such as the founding of Britain by Brutus and the King Arthur legend and is considered a version of the Brut chronicle, a work that survives in around 250 manuscripts and was first printed in 1480 by William Caxton.

The St Albans version includes innovations such as woodcut diagrams and illustrations and has titles, decorative capitals and paragraph marks printed in red. The schoolmaster printer's *Boke of St Albans* also features colour printing. In Caxton's book these were still being added by hand.

While the prologue gives the date of the compilation as 1483 it wasn't printed until 1486. The switch to popular works in English represented by the *Chronicles* and *Boke of St Albans* suggests that the press was trying to emulate Caxton's success in Westminster in producing a proven money-maker – the typeface is also similar to Caxton's. Not long after, however, the St Albans press ceased publishing.

Image 1:

This was the first book printed in England to contain a printer's mark, consisting of a double cross and orb with the arms of St Albans.

C.11.b.1* = IB.55708. The British Library

Image 2:

A later press operated in St Albans from c. 1534 until 1539. Printer John Herford worked with the last abbot, Richard Boreman, possibly from the Abbey Gateway. After the dissolution of the Abbey, the workshop was dismantled and taken to London, where a Nicholas

Bourman, possibly a relative of the abbot used the equipment for a short time.

St Albans Abbey Gateway

Case label:

One of the first printed chronicles to appear in England, published in the year that Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485.

The Chronicles of England. C.11.b.1. The British Library.

Matthew Paris' *Life of St Alban*

While Matthew Paris was a talented writer capable of producing detailed works on a wide range of subjects in both Latin and French, he was also an artist of great ability. Paris was usually unable to resist illustrating his works and his drawings appear in the margins throughout. His most lavishly illustrated work is the *Life of St Alban* which includes 54 surviving illustrations, apparently all in Paris' hand. These dominate the manuscript, running across the top half of the page with accompanying captions, while text is relegated to a secondary role below this, at the bottom of the page.

The manuscript covers the life of St Alban as well as verses in French on the martyrdom of Alban and Amphibalus in poetic form. Its style and layout point the way to a new approach to books and reading, suggesting that the ways in which books were used and by whom were changing, although Paris' intent is still to promote the monastery of St Albans. He includes the discovery of Alban's tomb by Offa and his building of the monastery.

The manuscript also contains French notes in Paris' hand showing that his manuscripts were lent to various aristocratic ladies, including the Countess of Arundel and the Countess of Cornwall. Paris was acting as an intermediary between these aristocrats who were commissioning works, and the artists who produced them, noting "In the Countess of Winchester's book let there be a pair of images on each page thus" and then describing the saints to be displayed. Works were now being read and commissioned by the non-ecclesiastical community, showing a growing interest in literature and a developing community of professional artists and scribes to produce these.

Image 1:

The execution of Alban. His soul, represented by a dove, flies heavenwards.

MS 177 f38r. The Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

Image 2:

King Offa oversees the search for and discovery of Alban's tomb; a bishop holds Alban's skull.

MS 177 f59r. The Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

Christina of Markyate and the *St Albans Psalter*

Born in 1096, Christina was the daughter of an Anglo-Saxon nobleman. After visiting the shrine of St Alban aged 14, she decided to lead a spiritual life. After refusing the advances of the Bishop of Durham and a nobleman named Burthred, she fled in disguise to Flamstead, and received spiritual guidance from the hermit, Roger of Markyate.

Upon Roger's death in 1123, Christina took over the hermitage at Markyate. Geoffrey de Gorham, Abbot of St Albans, visited her and she became his spiritual adviser. Geoffrey's abbacy saw a shift from worldliness and materialism towards greater care for the poor, perhaps due to Christina's influence.

Sometime around 1131 she became a nun and in 1145 Geoffrey endowed a priory for her at Markyate. At some point a written record of her life, the *Vita* was commissioned. Christina probably died in about 1156. Under Geoffrey's protection she had been venerated alongside St Alban but after her death Christina received

no fine burial at the abbey and her *Vita* was abandoned half-finished.

The *St Albans Psalter* was made in the scriptorium during the 1130s. Despite occasional Anglo-Saxon features, the Psalter is one of the most important examples of English Romanesque book production. It consists of five parts: the psalms; forty full-page miniatures depicting scenes from the Bible; the *Chanson of Alexis* (the oldest surviving text written in Old French); a discourse on good versus evil, and a perpetual calendar with days of bad luck clearly marked.

It is unclear whether the manuscript was intended for Christina from the beginning, whether it was adapted for her while it was being made, or whether it became hers after its completion.

Image 1:

The most famous initial is the so-called Christina Initial, which begins Psalm 105. The initial is the letter C and depicts a woman believed to be Christina leading a group of monks to Christ.

St Albans Psalter P285. Dombibliothek Hildesheim

Image 2:

The martyrdom of St Alban.

St Albans Psalter P416. Dombibliothek Hildesheim.

Roger of Wendover (d. 1236)

Although there were no doubt chroniclers at St Albans before him, Roger of Wendover is the first who can be identified. Roger briefly became prior of the cell of Belvoir in Leicestershire, but was deposed after a visit by the abbot due to financial mismanagement.

On his recall to St Albans he worked on the *Flores Historiarum* (Flowers of History). Like other chronicles this was based on earlier works. Roger claims in his preface to have selected "from the books of Catholic writers worthy of credit, just as flowers of various colours are gathered from various fields." Other than Paris' reworkings, only two copies of Roger's works survive, both later copies.

The first part of Roger's chronicle runs from the Creation to 1202 and is a compilation from various existing well-known authorities, in particular Ralph de Diceto's chronicle, which Roger used heavily for Richard I's reign. The second part begins with the year 1202 and starts with Roger adding comments to accounts from other writers, about events he would have witnessed. From around 1216 until 1234 this chronicle is clearly

primarily his own. His style is lively and he has first-hand access to events from people who witnessed them as well as documentary sources held by the abbey.

His successor Matthew Paris reworked much of Roger's chronicle, but also clearly learned from him. Roger's negative portrait of King John certainly influenced him.

Image 1:

Roger's views influenced Matthew Paris' later work.

Here, Paris draws the Kings of England; John's crown is slipping from his head.

Cotton MS Claudius D VI f9v. The British Library.

Image 2:

Death of William the Conqueror.

Matthew Paris' History of England used symbols to help locate key events. The upturned shield indicates the death of William the Conqueror. The upright shield marks the accession of his son, William Rufus, to the throne.

Royal MS 14 C VII f13v. The British Library.

Ralph de Diceto's *Abbreviationes*

Chronicorum* and *Imagines Historiarum

This manuscript includes two historical works by Ralph de Diceto (died circa 1200 AD). As Dean of St Paul's in London he was in close touch with national events; he was known to Henry II and counted the Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop of London and the Chancellor amongst his friends.

Ralph produced a history of the world from the birth of Christ to contemporary times in a more ambitious form than previous English works. The *Abbreviationes Chronicorum* (Abbreviation of Chronicles) was a history of the world from the Creation to 1147, summarised from earlier chronicles. The *Imagines Historiarum* (Impressions of History) focused on more recent events between 1149 and de Diceto's death. Beginning as a compilation, it is de Diceto's own work from 1172 and a contemporary record from 1181.

As a chronicler Ralph is careless in his chronology, with documents selected on no clear principle, although he displays considerable insight when discussing political situations. His great achievement was in realising that a

mass of information and documents made historical writing unwieldy. Ralph provided summaries and abstracts for easy reference and used symbols to allow the reader to find sections on different themes throughout the book. Unusually for the time, the *Imagines* begins with a summary of its contents. Matthew Paris was clearly inspired by Ralph's indexing system of marginal signs and images and developed it in his own works.

Image 1:

Ralph de Diceto's chronicle was copied at St Albans and became a reference for both Roger and Matthew Paris. De Diceto's *Opuscula* (little works). While most text is set out in the two standard columns, complex information, such as the rulers of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is presented in tabular form for easy reference.

Royal MS 13 E VI f1r. The British Library.

Image 2:

De Diceto's *Opuscula* (little works). While most text is set out in the two standard columns, complex information, such as the rulers of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is presented in tabular form for easy reference.

Additional MS 40007 f20v. The British Library.

Case label:

The beginning of the *Imagines Historiarum* (Impressions of History) by Ralph de Diceto, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London from c.1180.

Ralph de Diceto's *Abbreviationes Chronicorum* and *Imagines Historiarum*. Royal 13 E VI. The British Library.

The *Liber Additamentorum*

(Book of Additions)

As he developed his chronicles, Matthew Paris realised the historical importance of including documents related to those events he described. While this provided a more factual record, the copying or pasting of these documents into his chronicle made it too unwieldy to use, so Paris removed them into a separate work around 1255.

Even separated from the *Chronica Maiora*, the *Liber Additamentorum* contained some 350 documents, including a single page copy of the Magna Carta. Two other major works were also included in it which show Matthew's somewhat variable approach to historical truth.

The *Lives Of The Two Offas* was a richly illustrated, but largely fictitious text, designed to enhance the reputation of the monastery. The *Gesta Abbatum* is a more accurate monastic history of St Albans. Matthew covers the period from 1195 to 1255, in detail taking in the abbacies of John de Cella, William of Trumpington and

John of Hertford, the abbots that Matthew, or his elderly fellow monks, were personally familiar with. It reveals much about the life of the monastery including traditions, services, ceremonies, discussions in the chapter house, details of artefacts and building work.

The *Gesta* included the charters, writs and papal letters on which the privilege and status of the abbey were based. Both works were intended to defend the abbey's position and privileges, no doubt why they were both included in the *Liber Additamentorum* amongst the other documentary sources Matthew had compiled.

Image 1:

The *Liber Additamentorum* included details of gems in the abbey's collection.

Cotton MS Nero D 1 f146v. The British Library.

Image 2:

The *Lives Of The Two Offas* tells of the foundation of St Albans Abbey through the story of the mythical King Offa of the Angles and King Offa of Mercia.

Cotton MS Nero D 1 f2r. The British Library.

Kalendar

As well as a list of days in the year, *Kalendars* noted major feast days and saints' days and were common features of psalters (books including the biblical book of psalms). Although the names of the months are the same as those we still use, the numbering of the days was based on the ancient Roman system of kalends from which the word calendar derives.

The first section of this manuscript is a partial copy of the St Albans Psalter written between 1119-1146 giving the liturgy and feasts of St Albans Abbey, including the feasts of Saints Alphege, Mark, Botolph, pope Leo the Great, and Alexius, which all appear in later St Albans calendars, but also the feast of St Juliana (16 February), which does not. More important saints were often listed in red or coloured ink, the derivation of the phrase 'red letter days'. The ordination-day of Geoffrey of Le Mans, Abbot of St Albans 1119-1146, appears to be exceptionally highly graded, being written in both red and green.

The calendar's liturgical notes were added to certain feasts in January and February in a thirteenth century hand, presumably indicating that by then the volume had passed out of monastic possession. The title 'papa' (Pope), where it occurs, has been erased.

The *Kalendar* was bound together at an early date with a copy of *On the Trinity* by Augustine of Hippo, a work of doctrinal importance.

Image 1:

Kalendar for the month of December, with a man slaughtering a pig. The sign of the Zodiac for December, Capricorn is shown towards the bottom right. Christina of Markyate's death is noted on the 8th.

St Albans psalter P14. Dombibliothek Hildesheim.

Image 2:

A liturgical calendar from St Albans Abbey, with names of saints associated with St Albans. Feasts are marked

in blue and red. There are alternating blue and red headings to each month.

Cotton MS Claudius D VI f218v. The British Library.

Case labels:

Portrait of Abbot Leofric. When writing on the early, Saxon history of the abbey, Matthew had few sources and is less accurate in his writings. Here, he writes in red that Abbot Leofric was elected archbishop of Canterbury when in fact it was Abbot Aelfric.

The Liber Additamentorum. Cotton MS Nero D I f32v.
The British Library.

Kalendar for June. The Roman numerals in the left-hand column run from one to 19. These are known as the golden numbers, which help to find the date of Easter in any particular year. The golden number shows when the new moon will appear, and therefore the date of the full moon 14 days later.

Kalendar. Egerton 3721 f 4v. The British Library.

Matthew Paris

Matthew became a monk at St Albans on 21st January 1217 and probably died there in 1259. He received his training as a scribe and artist, under Roger Wendover and became highly regarded for his capability as a chronicler, with King Henry III requesting him to record events for posterity on at least one occasion.

Matthew's position at St Albans meant he was close to the heart of government and had access to many of the most important people in the land. King Henry III visited at least nine times, while earls, including Henry's brother Richard, recounted events to him, as did knights, bishops, clerks and councillors. Matthew also had access to exchequer records as well as those of St Albans Abbey.

Matthew worked hard to provide accurate chronological accounts of events and while he sometimes displays a short-sightedness to the bigger picture, for a chronicler he was unusually interested in the wider world, recording events simply because he found them interesting. Like many monks, Paris employs literary

devices in his works, and quotes classical authors and biblical references, but it is the range and depth of his historical work, that make his works so important.

Although his contacts may have hoped to have their deeds recorded positively, Matthew was far from impartial; his sympathies lay firmly with St Albans Abbey, and he happily slandered those who did not put the interests of his abbey first. Despite this, Paris' willingness to admonish everyone from the king down for their failings rather than slavishly following any official line, along with his lively style meant that his chronicles became much referenced in later centuries. This would have surprised the monk as his sometimes-indiscrete accounts, were not intended for public consumption.

Image 1

A self-portrait of Matthew. St Albans was unique among English Benedictine houses, in producing a historical school which lasted until nearly the end of the Middle Ages, long after historical writing in other houses had

ended. This was largely due to Matthew's influence on succeeding generations of St Albans monks.

Royal MS 14 C VII f6r. The British Library.

Image 2

Matthew recorded international events as well as those close to home. By 1238 he was aware of the Mongols. They became a serious threat to Christian Europe and were seen by many as a sign of the approaching end of the world which may explain Paris' portrayal of them as cannibalistic torturers.

MS 016II f167r. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Image 3

Henry III carries a vial of holy blood to Westminster. Matthew praised Henry for his piety but often condemned him for his political naivety.

MS 016II f216r. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Matthew Paris and the *Chronica Maiora*

Many monasteries produced chronicles in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These reported events significant to the religious community, recorded its historic rights and privileges and any successful defence of them.

While chroniclers personally recorded events within their lifetime, they also included earlier events from other chronicles. Paris was particularly influenced by his predecessor at St Albans, Roger of Wendover's own *Flores Historiarum*. Paris heavily edited, revised, corrected and extended Roger's work, bringing it more in line with his own academic and narrative standards, before continuing the chronicle into his own time, writing 300,000 words in this section alone.

Matthew researched his chronicle assiduously, supporting his narrative with documentary material and displayed interest in life beyond the abbey and the elite, including material not directly relevant to his abbey. He also recorded more than other chroniclers – the *Chronica Maiora* and its supporting documents held in

the *Liber Additamentorum* are as long as all the other chronicles of the 13th century combined.

Matthew's wide interests and his willingness to speak out against the elite provides an uncensored view from a well-informed individual to the unfolding events shaping the future of his country. In particular, Matthew's account of the struggles of the barons to limit the king's power, and the English Church's attempts to do the same with both pope and king mean the *Chronica Maiora* can be seen as a complex record of England's development as a nation.

Paris intended his chronicle to run until 1250. Upon completion, he had the work copied. Later he removed some of the more offensive passages from the original. Fortunately, they survive in the copy.

Image 1:

Paris' interests included science, astronomy and the natural world. Here he records details of a solar eclipse. Royal MS 14 C VII f181r. The British Library.

Image 2:

Paris' interest in the world led to him drawing a number of maps. Some were abstract showing towns on a route, a style typical of the time, but Paris also attempted geographical representations. While these are of limited accuracy – precise surveying was not achieved for another 300 years – they are the first English attempts at modern mapmaking.

Royal MS 14 C VII f5v. The British Library.

Case label:

Matthew was as talented an artist as he was a writer. His wide-ranging interests meant that the elephant kept by Henry III at the Tower of London and believed by Paris to be the only one ever to be seen in England was a worthy subject for his pen. He included the elephant's keeper for scale.

The *Chronica Maiora*. MS 016I fiiir. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

John of Wallingford

John of Wallingford became a monk in 1231 probably at Wallingford Priory, a daughter house of St Albans Abbey. In 1246 he became infirmarer at St Albans where he was responsible for the sick.

This *Collectanea* is a collection of miscellaneous material owned by John during his lifetime. It is written in a number of hands, probably including John's and includes medical recipes, charters and a chronicle that appears to be based entirely on works by his colleague and friend Matthew Paris. It is unclear whether the rest comes from other sources or from material by Matthew which no longer exists. The *Collectanea* includes, for instance, the story of the torture and murder of one of the king's cooks by Geoffrey of Lusignan, though this is only alluded to by Paris in the *Liber Additamentorum*.

The *Collectanea* includes two drawings by Paris, one being a drawing of John. Sometime after 1253 John was transferred to Wymondham priory, a cell of St Albans in Norfolk where he died in 1258, although he seems to have continued working on the *Collectanea* after his

transfer as some of the passages inserted later in the margins or between the lines, concern Wymondham.

Amongst its contents, the *Collectanea* includes a table for predicting the time of high tide at London Bridge, a draft for a map of Britain by Paris and a copy of Matthew Paris's picture of King Henry III's elephant.

Image 1:

This map by Matthew Paris seems to have been rejected from one of Paris' works as the parchment was folded, cut and then reinserted into the *Collectanea* of John Wallingford, who added further place names in black ink.

Cotton MS Julius D VII! f1r. The British Library.

Image 2:

The first European example of a tide table, predicting high tide at London Bridge. The left-hand column is marked 'Flod at London brigge', while the time the moon passes north in the sky is marked in the right column.

Mathematical and astronomical calculations would have

been commonplace for the educated monks at St
Albans.

Cotton MS Julius D VII f45v. The British Library.

Richard of Wallingford

(1292-1336)

A blacksmith's son, Richard was sent to study at Oxford by the prior of Wallingford. In 1314, he trained as a monk in St Albans, before returning to Oxford to study for a degree in theology. Instead, he spent most of his time working on astronomy and trigonometry, notably writing his treatise on the Albion, an astronomical calculating instrument there.

He returned to St Albans in 1327 and was elected abbot. At the time the abbey was heavily in debt, the south wall of the nave had collapsed, discipline was lax, the daughter houses complained of extortion and the town, by obtaining its own charter, had escaped from the abbot's control. In spite of this he began building an astronomical clock using expensive materials, explaining to Edward III that anyone could rebuild the nave but only he could build his clock, described in the *Tractatus Horologii Astronomici*.

Richard expelled or banished to the daughter houses troublesome monks; manors and churches were

investigated, bad officials removed, repairs authorised and debts settled. Richard also regained control of the town, launching a number of court cases after first ensuring the support of the king and local gentry, while also negotiating with leading individuals from the town until they were persuaded to give up the town's charter and seal and agree to the controversial use of the abbey's mills for grinding corn, rather than their own.

Richard's energetic championing of the abbey came despite developing leprosy and he proved so effective that he remained as abbot even though lepers were usually isolated.

Image 1

Richard's Albion was a machine designed to simplify astronomical calculation especially the calculation of solar, lunar and planetary longitudes, and which could predict eclipses. The *Tractatus Albionis* describes this.

Harley MS 625 f147v. The British Library.

Image 2

Page fragment from Richard's *Rectangulus*, a work for observation and determining the paths and places of the planets and fixed stars.

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Image 3

Richard was clearly linked closely with his work in mathematics, physics and astronomy. In the *Book of Benefactors* compiled almost two centuries later, he is portrayed working on one of his calculating machines.

Cotton MS Claudius E IV f201. The British Library.

Case labels:

John of Wallingford was a contemporary of Matthew Paris and this book, once in John's possession, includes a number of Paris' drawings including a portrait of John himself.

Collectanea of John Wallingford. Cotton MS Julius D VII f42v. The British Library.

This book is an anthology of scientific texts. This section is the beginning of Richard's *Tractatus Albionis* which describes the construction and operation of Richard's Albion, a device designed to plot the position of the sun, moon and planets.

An Anthology of Astrology and Astronomy. Bodleian MS Ashmole 1796 f118r. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Monastic worship

The monks of St Albans Abbey followed the rule of St Benedict, living communally with lives devoted to study, work and prayer. While many had specialist jobs and did not attend every service, there was always a group dedicated to maintaining the Opus Dei (Work of God) throughout the day and night.

Lauds was celebrated at daybreak and Compline at dusk, so precise timings varied according to the season. In between, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones and Vespers were held when further prayers were said. During the night the monks were woken and went into the church for the service of Vigils. The monks also attended Mass at least once a day.

Services took place in the monks' choir of the abbey church and included prayers, readings from the Bible and the saying, or chanting, of the Psalms. On holy days and saints' days, the liturgy could be far more elaborate.

Image 1:

St Benedict hands his rules to St Maurus. The original rules dated from the 6th century but had been reformed over time leading to claims from some that the

Benedictines were living too easy a lifestyle.

Additional MS 16979 f21v. The British Library.

Monastic worship contd.

Many monasteries gradually developed their own rules (or 'customaries') for the detailed practice of the Opus Dei. While no customary survives for St Albans, the purchase or donation of relevant books such as ordinals, missals, psalters, service books and antiphoners is noted in the monastic records and provides evidence of a rich and elaborate liturgical practice.

Manuscript Laud Misc. 279 from the Bodleian library is a surviving missal from St Albans containing instructions and texts for the celebration of mass.

Occasionally abbots would issue regulations and reforms which provide details of both good (and bad) practice. Abbot John de Maryns (1302-8) reduced the number of psalms to be chanted at each service, while Abbot John Wheathampstead (1420-40 and 1452-65) introduced lay singers from outside the monastery for the Lady Mass, by now an important service.

Image 2:

The *Sherborne Missal* is a lavishly decorated service book made for the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary's in Sherborne, Dorset. Similar books may have once been used at St Albans Abbey. Here the order of the Mass, and the Gloria in Excelsis hymn are displayed with busts depicting the hierarchy of the Church and the Annunciation to the Shepherds.

Additional MS 74236 P359. The British Library.

Image 3:

This page covers the Mass for Easter Sunday, with the resurrection of Christ shown in the decorated initial letter. The Abbot of Sherborne, artist and scribe all appear amongst the other images.

Additional MS 74236 P216. The British Library.

Case labels:

The flyleaf of this book notes that it was acquired by John de Dunstable in the early fourteenth century and

was kept in the passage on the north side of the abbey church, beyond the choir. By the fifteenth century, it was in use in the chapel of the monastery's infirmary.

St Albans Missal. Bodleian MS Laud Misc 279 f4v. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

This shows the opening of the gospels presented as parallel texts – a striking arrangement that underlines that the Bible was intended for serious theological study.

Bible. MS 048. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

John of Wheathampstead and his *Granarium*

John of Wheathampstead's time as abbot of St Albans was tumultuous. After 20 years he resigned, only to be persuaded to return to the role later in his life and was Abbot as the Wars of the Roses were raging. John studied at Oxford where a shared interest in learning led to him becoming a good friend of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who shared his interest in knowledge and the new humanist writings from Europe.

Given John's interests it is not surprising that he also chose to record a history, of which, this is the only known surviving copy. It was a shorter version than those of his predecessors, which seems to have been intended as just one entry in John's much grander work, the *Granarium*; an ambitious encyclopaedia of history, literature and philosophy.

This 'granary' – a pun on Wheathampstead's name, but also a view of the reference work as a store of knowledge – drew on numerous classical sources. Wheathampstead also made use of obscure texts,

showing the monastery still had access to a wide range of works. The then new Italian humanist works of Petrarch, Boccaccio and Leonardo Bruni, part of what would come to be known as the Renaissance also feature.

In its scope, arrangement and combination of interests the *Granarium* was unique. John compiled over 1,500 entries, arranged alphabetically, cross-referenced and distributed across four parts. He began work on the *Granarium* in the 1420s and was still updating part one in 1439. It has not survived complete, and what remains is spread across a number of manuscripts. John may never have completed it.

The *Granarium* was cited by antiquarian William Camden as a source for British history while John Leland also mentions it, but perhaps because of its incomplete nature, it has never been printed, edited or translated into a modern edition.

Image 1:

Abbot John appears twice in the *Book of Benefactors* due to his two separate periods as abbot.

MS Nero D VII f37r. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Image 2:

Abbot John's grave was rediscovered in 2017, during excavations for the Cathedral's new Welcome Centre. In it were the 3 papal bullae (or seals) which had been attached to the documents confirming the papal privileges.

Macrobius' *Saturnalia*

Classical Roman and late antique authors were popular in the 12th century amongst the educated elite and the monks of St Albans Abbey were no exception. This manuscript was most likely made in St Albans; there is a thirteenth-century list of contents on the flyleaf in a format characteristic of St Albans Abbey. It includes three works of Platonic philosophy, *Saturnalia* and *The Dream of Scipio* by Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius and *Opera philosophica* (Philosophical works) by Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis, a Numidian Platonist philosopher.

Macrobius, was an early fifth century Roman provincial scholar. His commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* was a popular Platonist work in the Latin West during the Middle Ages and helped to preserve Cicero's work. It considers metaphysical subjects, including the nature of the universe, the divine and the soul in the format of a fictional dream experienced by the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus in which he meets his dead grandfather. The *Saturnalia* is a compendium of ancient Roman religious and antiquarian lore provided in the

form of a series of dialogues among learned men at a fictional banquet held during the holiday of the Saturnalia and runs to seven books.

Scriptoriums such as the one at St Albans helped to preserve many classical works from destruction. Works of knowledge and philosophy were considered worthy of study and were copied into new volumes such as this.

Image 1:

The beginning of Macrobius' Saturnalia. Philosophical works remained popular in the following centuries – the Saturnalia was one of the sources for John Wheathampstead's 15th century work Granarium.

MS 071 f1r. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Image 2:

The list of contents for this manuscript is written in a style used by St Albans Abbey. A fifteenth-century note values the book at twenty shillings.

MS 071 fiv. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Case labels:

The start of John of Wheathampstead's history of England, beginning with the supposed foundation of England by the legendary Trojan, Brutus.

A History of England by John of Wheathampstead in his *Granarium*. MS Bodleian 585 f17r. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

The start of the *Dream of Scipio* reveals that for all its remarkable conquests, Rome is but a speck on the horizons of the heavens. Its representation of the celestial bodies and its reflections on their meaning attracted the interest of medieval scholars.

Macrobius' *Dream of Scipio*. MS 071 f85v. Corpus Christi College Cambridge.

What happened to the books

On 5 December 1539 the abbey was closed by Henry VIII's commissioners, and the abbot and monks pensioned off. The abbey's treasures – gold, silver, jewels, vestments and its library of books – were taken away and sold with the money going into the king's coffers.

The quality and importance of the St Albans books meant that they became prized by collectors. Richard de Bury (Bishop of Durham) was buying books from the abbey for his personal library in the early fourteenth century, while Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (Abbot of St Albans from 1521-30) removed many of the abbey's books to add to his own collections. These later became part of the king's library and eventually formed part of the British Museum's early collections of manuscripts, alongside other books from St Albans that had made their way into the collections of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton and Robert Harley.

At least 150 manuscripts have survived. Some include an 'ex libris' inscription which identifies the abbey, an

individual monk or the abbot as the original owner. Others have been identified as works from St Albans through liturgical information in the manuscript, such as the inclusion of the feast days of local saints or information particularly relevant to the town. Works have even been identified through stylistic details linking the manuscript to a known scribe.

Many manuscripts eventually found their way into major libraries and archives which now own and look after them. The British Library, the Parker Library (at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) and the Bodleian Library in Oxford are amongst those that hold manuscripts from St Albans Abbey. Many have been digitised and are available to view on their websites.

Image 1:

Matthew Paris' *Life of St Alban* is now preserved in the collections of Trinity College, Dublin.

MS 177 f49r. The Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

Image 2:

The red thirteenth century inscription at the top states that the book belonged to the library of St Albans, while the 'TC' monogram in the lower right corner suggests that Cardinal Thomas Wolsey removed the book from the abbey's collection.

Royal MS 13 D V f1. The British Library.

Case in the middle of the gallery, nearest the entrance:

The stages of manuscript illumination

Tools, materials and artwork loaned by Patricia Lovett
MBE

First the vellum (calfskin) needs to be prepared using pounce powder. This is a mix of pumice and powdered cuttle fish which will remove grease and prepare the surface for the ink. On this piece of vellum you can see the dark spots where the hair follicles were.

Next the outline is applied in minium, an orange colour which is where the word miniature comes from.

Then an adhesive and real gold leaf are applied. The small bowl contains gesso which is the adhesive used to produce a raised effect. The gold leaf is applied with a burnisher. This dog tooth burnisher has an agate stone tip which is incredibly smooth, so it doesn't tear the gold leaf.

After the gold, the other base colours are painted. These are cinnabar and ultramarine.

Next any shades and tints are painted.

White highlights are the last details to be added.

Finally, a black outline brings everything to life.

This is a swan feather and the quill knife (or pen knife) used to cut it into a quill which would then be used to draw the illuminations.

Case in the middle of the gallery at the far end:

Vermillion mixed with gum arabic

Dragon's blood

Madder root

Gamboge

Malachite

Verdigris

Indigo bricks

Lapis lazuli

Ball of woad leaves

Oak galls can be crushed to make ink. An oak gall, or oak apple, grows when a gall wasp lays its larvae in an oak bud. The round gall protects the larvae until it is ready to burrow out. You can see the small holes the wasps escaped through on these galls.

Gold can be applied to manuscripts in several different ways. This gold powder would be mixed as an ink like the other pigments. It might not look impressive but it's very expensive.

The small piece of gold in the dish is called shell gold. It is premixed with gum arabic and used to be sold in mussel shells which gave its name.

You can also see a piece of gold leaf in the other case.

These jars contain pigments used to produce the beautiful colours of manuscripts. They would be mixed with gum arabic (the lumps of pale yellow transparent gum).

A yellow pigment called orpiment was sometimes used instead of real gold, but it contains arsenic so is very toxic.

Lapis lazuli is the blue colour also known as ultramarine or 'over the sea' and is very expensive. Other powders are made from ingredients that can be grown locally.

You can see madder root behind the pot of rose madder.

Pigments can be made from all kinds of different materials. Woad (at the far end) is made from leaves which here are crushed into a ball. Malachite is a polished rock which can be ground down into a powder. Gamboge looks like butterscotch, but when it is wet it becomes a much more vivid yellow.

Some pigments have legends attached to them. The piece of dragon's blood is either the resin from a tree of the *draecana* genus, or it is a mixture of the blood of an elephant and a dragon spilled whilst they are fighting to the death.

Interactive activity on the wall

The *Book of Benefactors* featured the images and descriptions of people who had contributed to the success of St Albans Abbey.

Draw the important people in your life and tell us what makes them special on one of these cards.

Leave your card on the shelves here to help us create our own Wall of Benefactors.

Nigel the miller who gave a yearly sum of 4 shillings to St Albans Abbey.

Joan, Countess of Kent, and Princess of Wales and of Aquitaine (d. 1385), who gave a gold necklace and 100 shillings.

Ealdred, Abbot of St Albans in the 11th century, who filled in the cave of a dragon.

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