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**Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*.**

## Introduction: “Jhesu mercy quod Salthows”

“Jhesu mercy quod Salthows” (“ ‘thanks be to Jesus!’ says Salthouse”) are the last words of the unique surviving manuscript (now London, British Library Additional MS 61823) of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It is an unremarkable and conventional scribal signing-off for the singular account of the remarkable life of Margery Kempe (d. c. 1439). In recent years Kempe’s *Book* has been mined by literary scholars and historians for the information it provides about lay piety, women’s devotion, and life-writing in late medieval England, but “Salthows”, the scribe of the unique surviving manuscript of her *Book*, has been given little attention. In this essay I suggest that Salthouse is an important figure in establishing the circumstances of the *Book*’s reception and early reiteration.

Since its rediscovery in 1934 (when the unique manuscript was happened upon in a country-house) the physical manuscript of the *Book* has received far less attention than its protagonist.<sup>1</sup> This is, perhaps, because the notes of the first critical edition, published in 1940 by the Early English Text Society and edited by Sanford

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An early rehearsal of some of the ideas in this essay appeared as “The Woman in White,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24 December 2015. I am grateful to A. S. G. Edwards, Alexandra Gillespie, Sebastian Sobocki, Daniel Wakelin, and Nicholas Watson for discussions about the material contained in this article, to audiences at Oxford and London who commented on versions of this material, and to the constructive comments offered by the editors and two anonymous readers for *Chaucer Review*. I am especially grateful to Nicholas Watson for sharing his unpublished work in progress on ‘The Lost First Draft of the *Book of Margery Kempe*’. The following abbreviations are used in this article: *MLGB*: Neil Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 1964); *DNB*: *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, gen. ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford, 2004) via [www.odnb.com](http://www.odnb.com)

<sup>1</sup> On the circumstances of the manuscript’s discovery see Julie A. Chappell, *Perilous Passages: The Book of Margery Kempe, 1534-1934* (Basingstoke, 2013); a clear description of the manuscript is provided by Pamela Robinson, “The Manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in ed. Julia Boffey and Virginia Davis, *Recording Medieval Lives* (Donington, Lincs., 2005), 130-40.

Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, are daunting in their apparent comprehensiveness. Meech and Allen correctly stated that “[o]ne cannot present facts of the language in the extant manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* until one has given the best answer one can to the question, ‘Whose language is it?’”<sup>2</sup> Yet Meech and Allen, like most subsequent scholars of the *Book*, seem not to have explored Salthouse’s identity very deeply – even as Salthouse is the very person whose language is demonstrably present in the extant manuscript. With the development of not one but two digital facsimiles of the manuscript, the material form of *The Book of Margery Kempe* has come once again into wider attention and it is time to reconsider the role of Salthouse, the scribe, in the production of the text as we have it now.<sup>3</sup>

Meech and Allen noted that Salthouse’s name is a Norfolk one, deriving from the village of Salthouse on the north Norfolk coast, about seventeen miles to the east of Burnham Market (whence Kempe’s own paternal family-name, Brunham or Burnham, originated). Meech and Allen then remarked that, based on Salthouse’s toponymic, “it is likely, therefore, although by no means certain, that he was a Norfolk man;” they produced from the records one person with this surname, an “Edward Salthous,” who was the common sergeant of Lynn in 1476-7, from which they adduced that it is “likely that there was a Salthouse family in Lynn at the time [the manuscript] was written.”<sup>4</sup> They were doubtless correct but, as the text of the *Book* is written in the Norfolk dialect about a Norfolk subject we can, in any case, locate its writing in this vicinity.

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<sup>2</sup> Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society Original Series 212 (London, 1940), p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Joel Fredell et al, via <http://english.selu.edu/humanitiesonline/kempe/index.php>; and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, The British Library Digitised Manuscripts project, via [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_61823](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_61823)

<sup>4</sup> Meech and Allen eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. xxxiii.

The compositional and authorial history of Kempe's *Book* is notoriously complicated; as the *Book* itself discloses, the text went through at least three flawed attempts at composition before Kempe's cleric-amanuensis was able to write it down, with Kempe "sumtym helping where ony difficulte was."<sup>5</sup> Various engaging scholarly arguments have explored the scribal origins of the *Book*, usually as a route towards identifying the amanuenses who collaborated with Kempe herself on producing the original lost manuscript (as described in the *Book's* Proem). In an influential and seductive but ultimately speculative reading, Lynn Staley has argued that Kempe's scribe is an invented self-authorising "trope", a strategic construct that gives Kempe, as a female writer, a masculine imprimatur.<sup>6</sup> John Hirsch has offered a lucid reading of the compositional process of the *Book*, suggesting that Kempe's "second scribe" should be considered the "author" of the *Book*.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, Nicholas Watson has launched a cogent argument that Kempe's *Book* is her own, produced in a mediated conversation with her amanuenses.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, Sarah Rees Jones has argued that Kempe is a character in a male-authored clerical production, "a book written by clergy, for clergy, and about clergy".<sup>9</sup> Margaret Gallyon and A. C. Spearing have suggested that the *Book* was, for the most part, written by Robert Springolde, one of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, 2000), p. 49. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition, hereafter referred to as *BMK*.

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park PA, 1994), 1-38

<sup>7</sup> John Hirsch, "Author and scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975), 145-50.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Watson, "The making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds., *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN, 2005), 395-434.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Rees-Jones, "'A peler of Holy Cheerch:' Margery Kempe and the Bishops," in ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al*, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* (Turnhout, 2000), 377-91.

Kempe's confessors.<sup>10</sup> And Felicity Riddy has forcefully suggested that we are barking up the wrong tree by trying to separate Kempe from her scribe; Riddy states "I...want a text, produced I do not know how; I do not care if it is the combined work of a woman remembering and breaking off to do other things, a man asking questions, both of them searching for and arguing over the words to say it with..."<sup>11</sup> But in seeking an account of the *Book's* origins, these scholars have largely been concerned with a lost and unknown piece of evidence – the archetype of the surviving manuscript – and the emphasis has necessarily been on working with the clues provided in the *Book's* text, rather than in the surviving manuscript. It is surprising, therefore, that so little attention has been paid to Salthouse, whose name and manuscript *are* extant, and whose identity yields valuable information. In describing Salthouse and attempting to provide a framework for his biography, I therefore seek to shift our attention from notional accounts of the authorship of Kempe's *Book* to a more evidence-led account of the production of the *Book* as we have it today.

If Salthouse has been considered by scholars he has tended to be understood to occupy the role of scribe rather than editor of the *Book*; Meech stated, with undue confidence, that Kempe had little influence on the orthography and composition of the text, which was regularised by Kempe's amanuensis and that "Salthows and any intermediate scribes" made few changes to the manuscript from which they were working.<sup>12</sup> Salthouse is held to have repeated the text of an "original" text, adding

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England* (Canterbury, 1995), 208-9; A. C. Spearing, "Margery Kempe," in ed. A. S. G. Edwards, *A Companion to Middle English Prose* (Cambridge, 2004), 83-97.

<sup>11</sup> Felicity Riddy, "Text and Self in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in Olson and Kerby-Fulton, eds., *Voices in Dialogue*, 435-453, at p. 438.

<sup>12</sup> Meech and Allen eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. ix.

only a few glosses, and he tends not to be written of as an authorial agent himself.<sup>13</sup> To differentiate roles such as “scribe” and “editor” is always fraught in a manuscript culture, and any assessment of Salthouse’s authorial role is necessarily hypothetical. By the text’s own account, he did not aim to correct those points where the text is clear about its own disordered nature: for instance, the book starts by stating how it “is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn” (*BMK*, p. 49). He included (or retained) a note at the end of book I, chapter 16, that the reader should “rede fyrst the xxi chapetre, and than this chapetre aftyr that” (*BMK*, p. 112), drawing attention to the narrative’s disorder but retaining an arrangement of the narrative as inherited from the archetype. The scribe preserved the awkward spelling of the town of Stralsund as “Strawissownd,” noting that “Yf the namys of the placys be not ryth wretyn, let no man mervelylyn, for sche stodyid mor abowte contemplyon than the namys of the placys, and he that wrot hem had nevyr seyn hem, and therfor have hym excusyd” (*BMK*, p. 401). It is not clear in these kinds of instances who the writing “he” is, and there is no reason for us not to believe that this is the writing voice of Salthouse, rather than the scribe of the original manuscript (or, indeed, *vice versa*). And, given that we do not have the archetype from which Salthouse was working, we cannot establish how far he might have altered the text as Kempe had composed it alongside her original amanuenses. This is not to attempt to

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<sup>13</sup> On the annotations in the manuscript, see below p. 00, and further Joel Fredell, “Design and authorship in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Journal of the Early Book Society* 12 (2009), 1-34, which describes the six annotators of the manuscript. A different account of the annotations is offered in Kelly Parsons, “The Red Ink Annotator of The Book of Margery Kempe and his Lay Audience,” in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe and Gower*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria, BC, 2001), pp. 217-238.

wrest the genesis of the *Book* from Kempe, or to suggest that Salthouse “invented” the *Book* as we have it today. Rather, by virtue of the fact that he read and copied the text, Salthouse leads us to the kind of audience this manuscript *originally* had (and by extension the way Kempe and her *Book* were received around or shortly after the time of her death).

### **Richard Salthouse of Norwich.**

The manuscript of the *Book of Margery Kempe* has a proficiency and orderliness about it that suggests that it was written by a well-trained scribe, probably highly educated and/or in holy orders. Salthouse’s scribal hand is neat and regular.

I suggest that this Salthouse was Richard Salthouse (*fl.* 1443, d. before 1487), a monk at Norwich’s Benedictine cathedral priory, one of the country’s most important, powerful, and wealthy ecclesiastical institutions. There, Salthouse was a member of a community of about fifty Benedictine monks, although three times that number of people lived within the precincts, as servants, pensioners, and various officers. The magnificent cathedral towered over the vital religious culture of what Norman Tanner has called “a remarkably religious city by the standards of western Christendom as a whole”, possibly “the most religious city in medieval Europe.”<sup>14</sup> It was also a fertile milieu of innovative piety, closely connected to London and to the Low Countries (a piety found in Kempe’s *Book*, which shows the influences of northern European saints, affective devotion, and so on).

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<sup>14</sup> Norman Tanner, “Religious practice,” in *Medieval Norwich*, Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson, ed. (London, 2006), 137-56, p. 137; for a fuller portrait of the religious culture of the city, see Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532*, Studies and Texts 66 (Toronto, 1984),



Salthouse's period at Norwich dovetails with the dates of the manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which is usually dated to c. 1444-1450 (the manuscript was certainly bound in the form in which we have it today after 1442).<sup>15</sup> We know from the priory records, as charted by Joan Greatrex, that Richard Salthouse entered the priory at Norwich as a monk on 1 November 1443 and he would go on to occupy various roles there, as hostilar (1457-9, 1464), cellarer (1465-6, 1468-70), chamberlain (1464-5, 1474-84, 1485-6), infirmarer (1467-8), and gardener (1470-71).<sup>16</sup> So, given the confluence of these dates, it is likely that Salthouse copied the manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* when he was a relatively young and junior monk. It is possible that he might have been from Lynn where, as Meech and Allen showed, there was later a family named Salthouse, and/or he might have been trained at Norwich's dependent priory at Lynn (where a subprior and four monks from Norwich were based) and moved to Norwich in the early 1440s.<sup>17</sup> We cannot

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<sup>15</sup> The dating of the Kempe manuscript is based on two pieces of evidence: the paper stock and a letter bound within its pages. The paper has not been securely identified but it is similar to paper imported to England, probably from Holland, in the 1440s (most likely after 1444; see Meech and Allen eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. xxxiv). The manuscript has bound within it a letter, contemporaneous to the copying of the manuscript, from Peter de Monte, a papal legate, to William Buggy (d. 1442), vicar of Soham (Cambridgeshire), also within the diocese of Norwich. The letter must have been written before 1442 (the date of Buggy's death) and was bound with the manuscript at a later date. It is therefore possible that this letter was archived at Norwich and that would explain how it found its way into the Kempe manuscript. Charity Scott Stokes, "Margery Kempe: her life and the early history of the *Book*," *Mystics Quarterly* 25 (1999), 9-68, suggests that the religious community at Soham might explain the movement of the manuscript; Soham is close to Denny, visited by Kempe, and Stokes speculates that If the vicar of Soham acquired the early copy of Margery Kempe's book, and a monk of Soham may have taken the letter when he left Soham "to embark on a period of study at one of the universities, it could have found its way from Oxford or Cambridge to Mount Grace Priory, perhaps by way of the monastic foundations at Syon or Sheen" (p. 48).

<sup>16</sup> Joan Greatrex, *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priories of the Province of Canterbury c. 1066 to 1540* (Oxford, 1997), p. 554.

<sup>17</sup> Greatrex, *Biographical Register*, pp. 541-2, show that in 1454-5 Salthouse received a payment from John Molet, a Norwich almoner who was closely connected to the

rule out the possibility that Salthouse wrote the Kempe manuscript in Lynn, as a novice monk, although the fact that he had entered the priory at Norwich in 1443 favours a Norwich context based on the usual dating of the Kempe manuscript to the second half of the 1440s.

From 1443, the rest of Richard Salthouse's life was spent at Norwich. Salthouse must have died before 26 November 1487, on which date a new cellarer at the priory at Norwich was approved, on account of Salthouse's death.<sup>18</sup> Between 1484 and 1487, by then probably in his 60s, Salthouse was prior of St Leonard's, a dependant cell of Norwich Cathedral located at Thorpe Wood, just outside Norwich. In the late fifteenth century, St Leonard's had become "by far the most important and lucrative" of Norwich shrines, holding a richly decorated statue of its patron saint; in tune with Kempe's spirituality, St Leonard's also held a "girdle of the Virgin" and an image of the Virgin decorated with objects of parturition, which attracted both male and female pilgrims.<sup>19</sup> During Salthouse's term as prior, St Leonard's acquired an image of Henry VI (d. 1471), in an unsuccessful attempt to generate a new pilgrimage cult around the "martyred" king.<sup>20</sup> St Leonard's also had its own sizable collection of

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religious community at Lynn. Molet's own studies (1437-8) and his inception (1441-2) at Norwich were funded by payments from the prior of Lynn.

<sup>18</sup> Greatrex, *Biographical Register*, p. 554. The date of the death of Richard Salthouse of Norwich helps us rule out *another* Richard Salthouse of Norfolk – he was a chaplain ("capellanus") who matriculated at Magdalen College, Oxford in 1482 and died at Great Yarmouth in 1492; he must therefore have been a different person. According to his will (Norwich, Norfolk Record Office 87 Wolman), this Richard Salthouse left his books to Magdalen College, Oxford, and all his other goods to Isabelle Salthouse of Flegg (Norfolk), near Great Yarmouth. It is possible that this Richard Salthouse is connected to the Salthouse family identified by Meech and Allen or the Richard Salthouse of Norwich, but he cannot be connected with either Kempe or the manuscript of the *Book*.

<sup>19</sup> See M. R. V. Heale, "Veneration and renovation at a small Norfolk priory: St Leonard's, Norwich, in the Later Middle Ages," *Historical Research* 76 (2003), 431-9.

<sup>20</sup> Heale, "Veneration and renovation," p. 448.

books, at least 48 volumes, most of which seem to have been on a kind of “permanent loan” from the library at the Cathedral Priory at Norwich.<sup>21</sup>

In 1997, Hilton Kelliher noted a manuscript of the *Summa* of Richard Wetherset and the *Historia Regum Britannie* of Geoffrey of Monmouth (now Cambridge University Library MS Ii.4.12) which has the name “Ricardus Salthowus” written in it. This manuscript, written c. 1275-1325, was formerly owned by the Benedictine Cathedral Priory of the Holy Trinity at Norwich. Kelliher did not probe its possible connection to the Kempe manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1. Signature of “Ricardus Salthowus” in the space for the unfilled initial “e”, Cambridge, University Library Ii.4.12, fol. ii<sup>r</sup>.**

**Figure 2. “Jhesu mercy quod Salthows❖”, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, London, British Library Add. MS 61823, fol. 123r.**

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<sup>21</sup> See *English Benedictine Libraries* ed. R. Sharpe *et al*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 4 (London, 1996), p. 312.

<sup>22</sup> Hilton Kelliher, “The rediscovery of Margery Kempe: a footnote,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (1997), article 19, 259-63. This ownership inscription is also noted by Barry Windeatt (footnote, *BMK*, p. 428), but the connection between the Salthouse signatures in the two manuscripts is not explored. The manuscript is described, but Salthouse’s signature is not noted, in Julia Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey Of Monmouth: A Summary Catalogue Of The Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1989), vol. III, pp. 81-2.

Salthouse's signature does not appear within the main body of the manuscript but rather on a fly-leaf, taken from a service-book (evidently unfinished, insofar as the initials have not been completed), which has been bound with the book at some point.<sup>23</sup> We can be confident that Salthouse wrote his name in the book when it was owned by Norwich, because the cathedral library's pressmark ("J.lvij"), dating to the period 1272-c.1325, predates Salthouse; the manuscript was then held at Norwich until the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Julia Crick notes that the two flyleaves at the end of the book were taken from the Advent Office of the cathedral priory at Norwich, strongly suggesting that the book was bound, and probably written, there;<sup>25</sup> these rear fly-leaves were likely taken from the same book as the front ones, on which Salthouse wrote his name.

The signatures of Salthouse in the two manuscripts (figures 1 and 2) are not identical but they are very similar, giving a strong impression of having been written by the same hand. Both are anglicana hands of the mid-fifteenth century and the letter-forms are of similar dimensions (notwithstanding the fact that in the manuscript now in Cambridge the writer has squeezed his signature, executed slightly more formally but in miniature, into a confined space left by an uncompleted decorated

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<sup>23</sup> The text alongside which Salthouse's signature appears is from the Divine Office for the Third Sunday in Advent, quoting Gregory the Great's *Homilies* (*Homilia 7. in Evang.*): "Ex huius nobis lectionis verbis, fratres karissimi, Ioannis humilitas commendatur: qui cum tantae virtutis esset, ut Christus credi potuisset, elegit solide subsistere in se, ne humana opinione raperetur inaniter super se." Such an assertion of being true to oneself rather than being swayed by public opinion is, of course, very much in keeping with Kempe's own sentiments! A further piece of marginalia (fol. 113r) within the book, a quotation from Balbus' thirteenth-century *Catholicon* ("Galli germani sunt theutonici / Galli senones sunt franci") may also be by Salthouse; the hand (especially the "h," "l," and abbreviations) and the ink are very similar.

<sup>24</sup> N. R. Ker, "Medieval manuscripts from Norwich Cathedral Priory," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1949), 1-28, p. 14. The number "124" on fol. 1r and on the manuscript's stubs date from c. 1600, as catalogued by Thomas James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (London, 1600), 53-69.

<sup>25</sup> Crick, *Historia*, vol. III, p. 82.

initial “e”). There are certainly differences between the two signatures, and we might reasonably expect there to be differences between two signatures, even if written by the same person, given constraints of space, a different nib and ink, and, possibly, written many years apart from each other. The outlines of most of the letters are similar, but some of the letters (the “h” in particular) are formed differently; the “duct” or flow of the pen is not identical, but, in the Cambridge manuscript, Salthouse was writing in a confined space. The Cambridge signature is generally heavier and might be said to be more formal. The subjective nature of identifying a scribal hand remains haphazard, and would not alone provide us with sufficient evidence to assert that the “Salthows” who left us the account of Margery Kempe is the same “Ricardus Salthowus” who wrote his name in the manuscript from Norwich now in Cambridge. However, the confluence of dates, places and the name “Salthouse” strongly suggests that the Salthouse who signed his name in Kempe’s *Book* was this Richard Salthouse of Norwich.

The Priory at Norwich had a large library, many of the books of which have been traced by N. R. Ker.<sup>26</sup> At the Dissolution it contained at least 1,350 volumes.<sup>27</sup> There is abundant evidence of books being bought for the library, but, whilst there was certainly a scriptorium at the Priory, records are lacking about scribal activity there. As Salthouse spent most of his adult life in the Priory at Norwich, and as we know that the Cambridge manuscript was owned by the Priory at Norwich, we can surmise that he wrote his name in it there.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, we are in a position to suggest that it was at Norwich cathedral, within a literate and sophisticated community of

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<sup>26</sup> Ker, “Medieval manuscripts.”

<sup>27</sup> Tanner, *The Church in Late Mediaeval Norwich*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> The book contains the earlier signature of another Norwich monk, Roger of Blickling (“ex libris Roger de Bliclingge monachus,” fol. 1v), who died before 1376-7. On Blickling see Greatrex, *Biographic Register*, p. 484.

Benedictine monks, that Margery Kempe's story was being told and preserved, probably within five to ten years after her death.

### **Margery Kempe at Norwich.**

There is every reason that Norwich was a place where people were interested in Margery Kempe, given her connection to and engagement with the monks in the city. Kempe would have been well-known to them as, after Lynn, Norwich is the most frequently-visited site in her *Book*. We learn that Kempe received a commandment from God to visit the church of St Stephen at Norwich where she met the vicar, Richard Caistor (d. 1420). Caistor, born in the town of that name on the north Norfolk coast, had held clerical office near Lynn (as vicar of Sedgeford (1397-1402) about fourteen miles from Lynn) and then later moved to Norwich. He became Kempe's confessor and a supporter against the locals' "rumowr and grutchyng" about her (*BMK*, p. 116). Later, she visited Caistor's grave at St Stephen's, Norwich, where "sche cryed, sche roryd, sche wept, sche fel down to the grownd" because of the fervent "fyer of lofe" working in her heart (*BMK*, p. 285).

Also at Norwich, Kempe visited William Southfield (d. 1414), a Carmelite friar and native of Norwich. On the same trip, she enjoyed "holy dalyawns" for "many days" with the anchorite Julian of Norwich (1342 – c. 1416) in her cell on the outskirts of the city (*BMK*, pp. 119-123). As Sebastian Sobecki has recently shown, Kempe's confessor Springolde, priest and curate at St Margaret's, acted for the monks of Norwich in a legal dispute in 1424, and we know that he was a conduit between

Lynn and Norwich (he is mentioned in Norwich records in 1436).<sup>29</sup> Later, Kempe passed through Norwich to make an offering at the cathedral: “sche went forth to Norwych and offeryd at the Trinite” (*BMK*, p. 150). It was at Norwich that a “good man” paid for Kempe’s contentious white clothes and, one Saturday evening, presented them to her (*BMK*, pp. 218-19). Much later, Kempe visited Norwich and Walsingham with her daughter-in-law and a hermit, at the beginning of the difficult round-trip to Prussia (*BMK*, p. 394). Norwich and its cathedral were central to the religious topography of Kempe’s life. Indeed, Kempe’s own parish church, St Margaret’s at Lynn, was a part of Lynn priory, itself a cell of the cathedral at Norwich. The bishops of Norwich were the overlords of Lynn and Kempe herself describes the occasion on which bishop John Wakering (d. 1425, bishop 1416-25) came from Norwich to Lynn to preach in St Margaret’s, Kempe’s church, and he bore her crying with patience. In short, if there were to be anywhere outside Lynn that Kempe’s treatise is likely to have been known, it is at Norwich. The Kempe manuscript as we have it today is well written, carefully executed, with few errors either of language or script. Salthouse was evidently producing a work of conscientious industry, as if to lodge Kempe’s life in the communal memory of the monastic library.

If we locate the writing of the Kempe manuscript by Salthouse at Norwich, as I suggest we might, then the history of Margery Kempe’s *Book* looks like this: Kempe died c. 1439 and approximately five to ten years later a cleric – Salthouse – who was possibly known to Kempe, from the visits she is recorded as having made to the town or from his own visits to Lynn, made a copy of the *Book*. The proem to the *Book*

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<sup>29</sup> Sebastian Sobiecki, “‘The wrytyng of this tretys’: Margery Kempe’s son and the authorship of her *Book*”, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015), 257-83, at pp. 274-5; also Meech and Allen eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 368-9.

records that Kempe did not wish its contents to be made known until after her death, and this is consonant with what little we know about its transmission. It is true that Kempe's *Book* is, to some extent, directed towards a lay audience, inasmuch as it offers an instructive example of a layperson's *imitatio Christi* and the difficulties of an apostolic calling in this world; but, in those terms alone, it would also have been of interest to a monastic community as an account of piety in familiar local and social settings, largely taking place within Norwich's diocese. Kempe certainly antagonised people, but her *Book* also records her charisma and promotes her ability to attract followers, notably ecclesiastical or devout men, such as John Acomb and John Kendal of York, Richard Caistor of Norwich, Richard of Ireland, Robert Springolde and Alan of Lynn, Thomas Marshall of Newcastle-under-Lyme, [John] Patrick of Melton Mowbray, Marcello of Rome, Bishop Philip Repingdon of Lincoln, and the unnamed English monk who accompanied her from Aachen. Salthouse's making of the *Book* suggests a desire to record Kempe's life and visions for posterity, in the format of a textual testament, parallel to a monastic record or a hagiographic document, building an orthodox and institutional textual edifice of a remarkable devout woman.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most significant gaps in our otherwise quite full knowledge of Kempe's life concerns the circumstances of her death and the extent, if any, of a following or a cult around her at this point. The problem is an engaging one because we are presented with two, somewhat contradictory, pieces of evidence. On the one hand, in 1438/9, Kempe – or at least someone of this name – was elevated to membership of the Guild of the Holy Trinity at Lynn, the wealthiest and most

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<sup>30</sup> See further Jeanette Dillon, "Holy women and their confessors or confessors and their holy women?" in ed. Rosalynn Voaden, *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1996), 115-40.



influential guild in the town.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, at least two copies of the *Book* were being made around this time (i.e. the lost archetype and the surviving manuscript), celebrating and recording Kempe's prayerfulness, visionary capacities, and the importance of pilgrimage, chastity, and poverty. Did Kempe end her life as a well-off urban gentlewoman, as a holy visionary, or, in keeping with the *Book's* endorsement of the "mixed life", was she both?

### **The building of a reputation.**

It is known from a bookplate in the manuscript which reads "*Liber Montis Gracie: this boke is of Mountgrace*" (fol. 1r) that the surviving manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* was later at Mount Grace, a Carthusian priory in Yorkshire.

Marginalia suggests it was read there for evidence of mystical practices, probably in the second decade of the sixteenth century, by readers who knew of the mystical theology of the Mount Grace clerics Richard Methley (a.k.a. Furth; b. 1450/51- d. 1527/8; a monk at Mount Grace c. 1510-15) and John Norton (prior 1521; d. 1521/2).<sup>32</sup> There is, however, no evidence of the date at which the manuscript made its way to Mount Grace, some 200 miles north of Norwich (even if Salthouse owned the manuscript until his death around 1487, the book may have travelled north at any point between its composition and c. 1510-20). While Mount Grace was the place where the manuscript found itself at least a generation after Kempe's death, it was not the original *destination* for the unique surviving manuscript of Kempe's *Book*. In her recent book on the history of Kempe's *Book*, Julie A. Chappell speculates that "the manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, made by the priest, her second

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<sup>31</sup> See Meech and Allen eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 358-9.

<sup>32</sup> See Michael Sargent, "Methley [Furth], Richard (1450/51-1527/8)," *ODNB*; W. N. M. Beckett, "John Norton (d. 1521/2)," *ODNB*.

amanuensis, and subsequently copied by a scribe named Salthows, may have arrived at Mount Grace by the hand of Salthows himself as a new Carthusian monk or as a cleric of another order.”<sup>33</sup> The identification of the Salthouse of Kempe’s manuscript with Salthouse of Norwich allows us to place Salthouse – and the early history of the Kempe manuscript - in Norfolk rather than Yorkshire.

Salthouse’s signing off, as shown in figure 2, includes his distinctive (but far from unique) Trinitarian “trefoil” device, which appears in some of the annotations made alongside Kempe’s texts. Joel Fredell has identified these annotations (in a hand Fredell refers to as “Little Brown”) as Salthouse’s, and, as Fredell shows, these annotations “quite deliberately shape the narrative into a specific devotional genre”:<sup>34</sup> that of a hagiographical *vita*, in which Kempe’s key moments of pious development are noted. As Fredell shows, these marginal annotations draw the reader’s attention to Kempe’s first fit of crying (fol. 33v), to her wearing of white clothes (fol. 37v), to her confession with John the Baptist (fol. 40r), to an early miracle (“*mirabile*”) in which a foreign priest can understand her (fol. 40v), to Kempe’s spiritual marriage to the Godhead (fol. 43r), to Kempe’s bold parable of the pear-tree and the defecating bear (fol. 61r), to her difficult conversations with her confessor Melton (fol. 75v), and to her reception of an indulgence (fol. 85v).<sup>35</sup> I concur with Fredell that the “Little Brown” annotator can, with reasonable security, be equated with Salthouse, not least on the basis of the shared trefoil device that appears in some of the annotations (fols. 33v, 40r, 40v, 61r, and in Salthouse’s signing-off at fol. 123r). So, even though Kempe’s life and piety were profoundly laic in nature and she exhibited a general lack of respect for conventual structures, for Salthouse – the monk at Norwich - Kempe

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<sup>33</sup> Chappell, *Perilous Passages*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Fredell, “Design and authorship,” p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Fredell, “Design and authorship,” p. 9.

seemed to be amenable to a Benedictine vision of holiness. I do not think we can suggest “saint-making” as such but rather the making of a testament of a life that demonstrated meekness, prayerful compunction, and the omnipresence of God.

At a later date, the Carthusian brothers at Mount Grace may have been particularly interested in the manuscript of Kempe’s *Book* for its accounts of Julian of Norwich (whose texts and reputation the Carthusians were instrumental in maintaining) and for Kempe’s spirituality, inflected as it is by incarnational piety. *The Book of Margery Kempe* would likely have appealed primarily though as an ecclesiastically-promoted life of a holy woman, whose text had circulated in some of the most vibrant towns of English religiosity, Lynn and Norwich. At Mount Grace, the manuscript of Kempe’s *Book*, which would have joined English and Latin devotional and mystical texts known to have been owned by Mount Grace, including *The Cloud of Unknowing* (London, British Library Harley MS 2373), Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls* (Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.2.56, in Richard Methley’s translation), Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Life of Christ* (Cambridge, University Library Add. MS 6578), and the *Speculum Spiritualium* (York, Minster Library XVI.I.9). Around the same time (c. 1501), the *Book* was mined by Wynkyn de Worde for a short set of extracts that foregrounded its protagonist’s contemplative prayerfulness and private revelation.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Richard Salthouse’s reading and writing of Kempe in the Priory at Norwich fits into the orthodox and pious reception of Kempe’s *Book* in the period following her death.

However, we should be circumspect about making bold claims on behalf of Richard Salthouse. Over the last few years, medieval English literary studies have

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<sup>36</sup> The same extracts were reprinted by Henry Pepwell in 1521. See Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago, 2000), 126-39.

witnessed a revival of interest in the historical biography of scribes. In no small part, this is due to Linne Mooney's significant identification of Adam Pinkhurst as Geoffrey Chaucer's scribe, and the reappraisal of scribal culture in Chaucer's London as facilitated by Mooney's work.<sup>37</sup> Mooney was able not only to give Chaucer's scribe a name and a biography, but also sought to identify other books written by Pinkhurst, and thereby deepen and broaden our understanding of the location of medieval literary culture. Mooney's article sets up networks of long-term associations between writers and scribes, and supervisory relationships mediated through scribal activity, much of her evidence based on forensic analysis of letterforms and the recognition of scribal hands. Yet, Mooney's methodology has proved to be not nearly as scientific as it at first appeared, as the identification of scribal hands transpires, in effect, to be a matter of subjective recognition. In an elegant meditation on Mooney's methodology, Alexandra Gillespie has argued for the importance of – and nebulosity of – the “literary” in using scribal and similar palaeographical evidence; Gillespie forcefully asserts that the identity of a scribe should not put to rest questions of interpretation and the validity of new readings.<sup>38</sup> More recently, in a wholesale re-evaluation of the evidence, Lawrence Warner has disputed some of Mooney's key claims and shown how tricky the secure identification of scribal relationships is, albeit while using a similar methodology of forensic identification to that used by Mooney.<sup>39</sup>

The question of Kempe's authorship is perhaps even more explosive, and fraught with ideological identifications and gendered silencing, than Chaucer's. Even

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<sup>37</sup> Linne R. Mooney, “Chaucer's Scribe,” *Speculum* 81 (2006), 97-138.

<sup>38</sup> Alexandra Gillespie, “Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam,” *Chaucer Review* 42 (2008), 269-83.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Warner, “Scribes, Misattributed: Hoccleve and Pinkhurst,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015), 55-100.

as this essay is based on scribal evidence of a striking similarity between two signatures, we should remain cautious about *instrumental* arguments about scribal identities, insofar as the identification of a scribe, or similar archival discoveries, little helps us to comprehend the historical or literary character of Kempe herself.

However, we are now in a position to suggest an ecclesiastical reception of the *Book* at Norwich in the first years of its circulation. Salthouse is a pivotal figure here not just because he is the “scribe”; Salthouse’s pen recorded the persona and voice we attribute to Margery Kempe. By identifying Salthouse and locating him at Norwich Cathedral Priory we gain a clearer impression of how the text was received in a monastic community before it found its way to Mount Grace. Salthouse is our first securely identifiable reader of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and we might cautiously locate the writing of the sole surviving manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* at Norwich Cathedral Priory. Such an august and orthodox institution is then one of the immediate contexts in which Kempe’s reputation was made, and *The Book of Margery Kempe* preserved.