

Skills for Medievalists: Week 7b Activity

What is the earliest reference to Chaucer's works on RED? Who was the original owner of the book which acts as the source of this reference? What else can you infer about the owner of the book based on the information provided on the website? What other books did they own, for instance?

- Earliest reference to Chaucer's work on here is 1450, and the original owner seems to have been the Carthusian monks at Mount Grace priory. They are quite clearly the owners were members of the clergy and there does not seem to be any other books that the priory owned on the RED website.¹

Are there any examples of famous historical persons reading Chaucer? What can you infer about their impressions of Chaucer based on the information provided on the website?

- The main famous person who read Chaucer was Mary Godwin, who is more commonly known as Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*. It was part of her reading list for the year 1815, which suggests they enjoyed it enough to put reference to it in their reading list for the year.²

Can you find examples of artisans, servants or labourers having read Chaucer? If so, choose one and try and find out as much as you can about the reader. Where were they from, for example? What other books did they read?

- G.A.W. Tomlinson, born 1906, was a non-agricultural labourer whose specific occupation was that of a collier/coal miner in England.³ In terms of other books that they read, they had in their library 'On the Origin of Species' by Charles Darwin, the 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' by Oscar Wilde, and 'the Charge of the Light Brigade' by Alfred Tennyson.⁴

¹ UK Reading Experience Database, *Record Number: 15148* (2001)

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=15148> [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

² UK Reading Experience Database, *Record Number: 13776* (1987)

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=13776> [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

³ UK Reading Experience Database, *Record Number: 4224* (2001)

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=4224> [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

⁴ UK Reading Experience Database, *List of Readings: G.A.W. Tomlinson* (2020)

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/browse_reader_readings.php?s=Tomlinson&f=G.A.W.> [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

What insights might your different searches provide into histories of the book and reading habits?

- They can indicate what sort of people like reading what, like what do adults compared to children read or what texts do an academic like to read.⁵
- Also indicates what were in the libraries of certain individuals, which can indicate the different owners of a specific text.⁶

⁵ UK RED, 13776 (1987) [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

⁶ UK RED, *List of Readings* (2020) [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

Biography

Electronic Sources

UK Reading Experience Database, *Record Number: 4224* (2001)

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=4224> [Accessed: 30 November 2020].

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