From West Country Farmers to W. H. Ireland, the Shakespeare Forger: The Previous Owners of Thomas Tusser’s *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (1599), BL, C.122.bb.40

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This article explores the provenance of a rare sixteenth-century copy of Thomas Tusser’s *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (printed by Robert Waldegrave in Edinburgh, 1599). Tusser’s book was a pioneer; it was the first agricultural manual to be aimed at rural, tenant farmers at the lower end of the social order rather than landowners and the aristocracy. It went through twenty-three editions between 1557 and 1638, and was something of a best seller. This seemingly unassuming copy contains rare material evidence of contemporary use and ownership by a family of tenant farmers, a demographic whose modest levels of literacy have resulted in few records surviving of their encounters with Tusser’s manual. In the eighteenth century it belonged for a time to William Henry Ireland, the notorious Shakespeare forger, who then passed it on to George Chalmers, the Scottish antiquarian book collector who amassed a significant gentleman’s library and who was also hoodwinked by Ireland’s forgeries. Following the auction of Chalmers’s library in 1842 this book found its way into the British Museum Library in 1846 via the London book trade and it now resides in the British Library with the shelfmark C.122.bb.40. This book is remarkable not just for its survival (it is one of the two copies extant of this edition) but because of what it reveals about each of its owners over the centuries.

Tusser’s husbandry manual in verse was first published in 1557 as *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie*. The second edition of 1562 was enlarged to include ‘a hundreth good poyntes of hwsowifery’ that expanded more fully on the labour undertaken by rural women. This carried through to later editions, including this 1599 edition. The main body of the book is a calendar of information and advice about the farming year and the secondary part covers the points of ‘huswifery’, including advice on household management and rural customs. Tusser’s was the first manual to ‘deal intimately with the vicissitudes of life for smaller farmers’. The influence of Tusser on the lower social classes has been assumed on the basis of its intended readership and its popularity. There is also some ‘evidence to suggest that Tusser’s work was read by contemporaries throughout the country, and also throughout the social order’, although this evidence is scarcer for rural workers.

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1 Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Waldegrave Printer to the Kings Majestie, 1599), ESTC S113197. Two extant copies of this edition, one at BL C.122. bb.40 and the other at University College London.


3 Ibid.
This copy of Tusser’s manual was owned, read and written in by a family of tenant farmers, and a groom who married into that family, in the early seventeenth century. This family lived in a village called Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, and worked at the same manor-house farm for several generations. Adam Miles was the first owner of this book. His name is signed twice, in a secretary hand, on pages 3 and 5 of the text and he adds other notes later on. A search of marriage indexes found an Adam Miles who married Joane Chreech on 30 December 1656 in Beechingstoke, Wiltshire. His occupation was a groom (during this period, a groom was more often than not a general servant). He died in 1685 in Ogbourne St George, a small village in Wiltshire.

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*Fig. 1. Ownership inscription of Adam Miles.*

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4 Wiltshire Marriage Index 1538-1933
[https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=PRS/WILTS/MAR/NIRO/0008010/G].

5 Wiltshire Burials Index 1538-1990
[https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=PRS/WILT/BIRS/BH/0000156].
Adam Miles’s annotations are sometimes obscure; they include a rather inexplicable note next to Tusser’s dedication to Lord Thomas Paget: ‘A woman that eats her breakfast’. He added a marginal note about the sowing of acorns in order to pinpoint the place in the printed text where this is discussed. He also wrote out the proverb ‘Serve God is the first, true love is not worse’ above its description in the text and added one further note on p. 141: ‘The servitor appointed at the guest chamber’ below a section of the text entitled ‘Lessons for waiting servants’. Servitor was an archaic term for a servant, or more specifically, a servant that waited at tables. Perhaps this is a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the servitor who waits on the guest chamber should read these lessons. There are also crosses and other symbols drawn in ink against particular stanzas on p. 130, further demonstrating a high level of engagement with Tusser’s advice.

By 1655 the book had passed into the hands of Edward Chreech, who may have been the son of Adam Miles and Joane Chreech. Edward Chreech is written several times, with some spelling and handwriting variations, on p. 9, p. 44 and again on p. 102, this time helpfully with a date: ‘1655’. It is probable that Joane was a member of the Chreech family of Charlton Mackrell, Somerset. It is an unusual name and the locations are not an insurmountable distance apart. There is another, earlier, record of a Joane Chreech, of Charlton Mackrell, marrying a Robert Walter in 1635. They could well be one and the same Joane; perhaps her first husband died and she remarried. The Chreech family were tenant farmers at a manor-house and farm in Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, by copyhold...

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*Somerset Marriage Index* [https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS/M/290135239/3](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS/M/290135239/3)

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-- a type of tenancy on land held from a manor. This copy of Tusser’s manual, therefore, provides important material evidence that this publication was read and used by the very demographic it was aimed at: rural tenant farmers as opposed to their more affluent landlords. This copy was deemed useful enough to pass down through the family, suggesting that the information provided by Tusser was relevant across generations. Today, this material evidence is valued for the insight it gives us into the lives and, more specifically, the reading habits of the average working family in seventeenth-century agricultural England.

By the late eighteenth century, this copy of Tusser’s *Good Husbandrie* was in the hands of William Henry Ireland (1775-1835), the notorious forger of Shakespearian manuscripts. The title page is signed ‘S.W.H Ireland’ (Ireland was also known as Samuel William Henry after both his father, Samuel Ireland (1744-1800), and a deceased brother). In 1794, William Henry Ireland ‘discovered’ a cache of old documents containing a deed signed by Shakespeare and the rest, as they say, was history. He went on to forge letters written by Shakespeare, a promissory note, books purportedly annotated by Shakespeare and even the original manuscripts for *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The Shakespeare experts of the day authenticated them all, perhaps not wanting to admit that this all seemed too good to be true. The forgeries continued until April 1796 when Edmond Malone, arguably the most esteemed Shakespeare expert of the era and a profound sceptic, published a study proving that Ireland’s manuscripts were forgeries, just two days before the premiere of the purportedly newly discovered Shakespearian play *Vortigern and Rowena*. In light of this, Ireland published a confession and apology. He lived the remainder of his life in relative obscurity although he did sell supposedly original copies of his forgeries to interested parties. He was evidently a chronic liar, and so we cannot trust completely the autobiographical accounts of Ireland’s later life. He even lied to his father about the existence of a fiancée when there was none.
William Henry Ireland had a complicated relationship with his father, Samuel Ireland, and this ties in with the history of this copy of Good Husbandrie. It is possible that this book passed into the hands of William Henry Ireland because it belonged to his father beforehand. According to William Henry Ireland’s autobiographical accounts, he began the forgeries primarily to please his father who was an engraver, amateur antiquarian and Shakespeare enthusiast. He presented his first forgery, the deed signed by Shakespeare, to his father in exchange for ‘some other tract’ from his father’s library. In his confessional account, William Henry Ireland describes how he shared his father’s ‘taste for old and curious tracts’ and Arthur Freeman surmises that ‘in the eighteen short months of his forging activity, William Henry composed and generated at least 170 “Shakespearian” manuscripts, nearly all of which he presented to his father, swapping them for books, or – pathetically – for parental

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8 Ibid., p. 4.
affection and respect”. It is possible therefore that William Henry Ireland obtained this copy of *Good Husbandrie* from his father too, in this fashion. Samuel Ireland displayed the Shakespeare deed and his son’s other forgeries at his residence in Norfolk Street, London, and edited the book that exposed the forgeries to a wider audience in 1796. When the forgeries were known, Samuel Ireland became a victim of ridicule and his reputation was permanently damaged. His level of complicity in his son’s forgeries has never been fully ascertained; contemporary commentators believed his guilt to be obvious; however, according to his deathbed declaration as heard by his physician Dr Latham, Samuel Ireland believed in the authenticity of his son’s forgeries until his death in 1800. Samuel Ireland’s library was sold at auction after his death and it included many rare editions of Shakespeare’s works alongside copies of his son’s forgeries and books that his son claimed were from Shakespeare’s library. The British Museum purchased Samuel Ireland’s correspondence regarding the forgeries in 1877.

Alternatively, William Henry Ireland could have bought *Good Husbandrie* himself. He clearly purchased old books; his first forgery, a dedicatory letter from Shakespeare to Elizabeth I, accompanied ‘a thin quarto tract of the time of Elizabeth, illuminated and bound in vellum’ that he had purchased himself. Heather Wolfe and Arnold Hunt argue that Ireland obtained many of the books that he later passed off as belonging to Shakespeare from ‘Benjamin White’s bookshop in Fleet Street and William Otridge’s in the Strand, carefully selecting items from bulk purchases or bound volumes of pamphlets so that the booksellers would be unable to identify them as having come from their stock’. It is clear that Ireland had his own library of sorts. How else did he ‘discover’ books containing Shakespeare’s annotations if they were not already in his possession? He also needed a supply of sixteenth-century paper for his forged documents: ‘Ireland’s Elizabethan paper was genuine; he would razor blank leaves out of old books’. Next, the book passed into the library of George Chalmers (1742-1825), the Scottish antiquarian, book collector and political writer, as proven by the presence of his bookplate on the front pastedown. He was one of the Shakespeare experts that authenticated William Henry Ireland’s forgeries. Chalmers had been ‘one of the intimate Ireland coteries. His name was on the list of subscribers to the fund and he had brought distinguished acquaintances to view the exhibit’, referring to Samuel Ireland’s house where the Shakespeare forgeries were displayed to visitors. Friendly letters exist between Chalmers and Samuel Ireland, two written in 1795 and one from early 1796. In the first letter, dated 9 May 1795, Chalmers presents his compliments and ‘begs to have a little private and confidential conversation’ with Samuel Ireland. The second is dated 9 June 1795, from Whitehall, and Chalmers asks whether Ireland will permit him to bring ‘Mr Smith, the Private Secretary of W. Pitt […] to see [his] Shakespeariana on Friday next’. In the 1796 letter Chalmers requests permission to visit and ‘Shak-spearize a little with [Ireland]’ – all very civilized.

13 BL, Add. MS. 30348.
18 BL, Add. MS. 30348.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
It seems as though relations soured later on in 1796, however, when William Henry Ireland’s forgeries were exposed by Malone. Chalmers wrote a furious diatribe aimed at Malone entitled An Apology for the Believers in the Shakspeare-Papers, which were Exhibited in Norfolk-Street (London, 1797) in defence of his own endorsement of the papers. In a more extensive confession published in 1805 Ireland included a letter to Chalmers, remarking that it had been some years since they last saw each other at ‘S. Ireland’s house in Norfolk Street’. Ireland opted for flattery, writing that ‘the profundity of [Chalmers’s] learning, the acuteness of [his] judgement, and the affability of [his] manners can never be forgotten’. Ireland hoped to be ‘restored to the place [he] formally held in the estimation of those whom [he] unintentionally offended’ by forging the Shakespeare papers. It is clear that Ireland and Chalmers were close acquaintances but it seems that their friendship did not survive the exposure of the forgeries and the ensuing embarrassment.

Chalmers amassed a significant gentleman’s library of thousands of rare books and pamphlets, including tracts about the early exploration and colonization of America, sixteenth-century playbooks and considerable material relating to Shakespeare. The presence of Chalmers’ bookplate on the front paste-down of BL, C.122.bb.40 and the manuscript notes on the endpaper in his hand demonstrate that this book was part of Chalmers’ library, probably after it belonged to

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21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
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Ireland. It is likely that Ireland gave this book to Chalmers, or perhaps sold it to him, considering they were well acquainted. Chalmers’s manuscript notes identify Ireland’s signature on the title page as ‘the autograph of William Henry Ireland, the forger of the Shakespeare papers’ and also adds a bibliographical note that ‘this work printed at Edinburgh, in 1599, is a real curiosity, says [Archibald] Constable, who could scarcely believe it till he saw this copy’. Archibald Constable was a Scottish publisher, bookseller and stationer. Clearly, Chalmers added the note about Ireland being a forger after his exposure in 1796 but he probably obtained the book before then. Chalmers also wrote a code in ink at the bottom of the title page ‘A V 3 P 1520’. This is a reference to Joseph Ames’s *Typographical Antiquities*, edited and augmented by William Herbert and published in three volumes from 1785 to 1790. This code refers to ‘A’ – for Ames, ‘V 3’ – volume three, and ‘P 1520’, which is page 1520 where this Edinburgh 1599 edition of Tusser’s *Good Husbandrie* is recorded. Chalmers often jotted bibliographical references on the title pages of his books; these notes can be found in many of the approximately 150 books with Chalmers’s bookplate that are listed on the English Short Title Catalogue, a number of which are now at the Huntington and Folger libraries.

George Chalmers’s library was sold at auction by Evans in September 1841. That of course included this copy of Tusser’s *Good Husbandrie* and, interestingly, two other sixteenth-century books with both William Henry Ireland’s signature and George Chalmers’s bookplate: the Huntington Library’s copy of *The Garden of Pleasure* (Imprinted at London, 1573) and the Folger’s bound up copy of Richard Whitford’s *The Conten[t]es of this Boke: A Werke of Preparacion, or of Ordinaunce vnto Com[m]union, or Howselying* (London, 1531?) and *A Werke for Housholders* (London, 1531). It is worth noting that George Chalmers’s library was initially inherited by his nephew (James Chalmers) following his death in 1825. It was only auctioned when James Chalmers died in 1841. When the library finally did go under the hammer, the sale was extensive; the first part alone spanned nine days. The second part began on 7 March 1842 and the third on 10 November 1842. It attracted considerable attention and highlights were reported in *The Times* on each day of the sale.

What is now BL, C.122.bb.40 was sold as lot 1198 to bookseller Thomas Rodd the younger (1796-1849), who supplied many early printed books to the British Museum. We know from the book’s British Museum ownership stamp and pencilled inscription that it was purchased in September 1846. The Accessions Register of the Department of Printed Books confirms that it was ‘purchased of Rodd’, as part of a large order of many books. The other two books with similar William Henry Ireland provenance were bought by Thomas Thorpe, a prominent bookseller in London between 1820 and 1850. *The Garden of Pleasure* then became part of the Britwell Court Library, which was sold in 1923, before it entered the Huntington Library. There may be other books with the same provenance that remain as yet undiscovered.

This well-used copy of Thomas Tusser’s *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie* is an excellent example of how useful the study of a book’s provenance can be. Its ownership can be traced from its publication through to the present day. The early seventeenth-century scribbles of the various members of the Chreech family are valued today as material evidence that Tusser’s manual was read by its intended audience of rural workers of the lower social orders. This copy’s later history also shines a light on the association between two notable figures of the late eighteenth century: William Henry Ireland and George Chalmers, who was hoodwinked by Ireland’s Shakespeare forgeries. It is hard to establish concrete facts about the life of a consummate liar but we can say with reasonable certainty that these books were in Ireland’s library and perhaps even in the same room as he forged Shakespeare’s signature and ‘discovered’ his lost manuscripts.

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25 Catalogue of the Very Curious, Valuable and Extensive Library of the Late George Chalmers ... Which Will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. Evans (1841)

26 ESTC S105885

27 ESTC S107844

28 ESTC S107848


30 DH52/23 Department of Printed Books: Register of Accessions, 1 August 1846 – 30 November 1846, f. 49.