

Writing in Medieval England

Dates	Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 August 2019
Times	10.30 – 17.00
Location	Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre
Level	All levels, please note that some preparatory reading is required for this course.
Class size	Maximum 16 participants

Course description

Explore the development of writing in Medieval England at this weekend course. During the first day you will discover the vast range of writing forms from this period, from graffiti and marginal scribbles to elaborately designed monuments and manuscripts. We'll look at the technology of writing – how parchment was made and how manuscripts were bound and decorated. On the second day you will consider the work of iconic writers of the period including Geoffrey Chaucer, Alfred the Great and Julian of Norwich, as well as anonymous scribes and lesser known annotators. We'll discuss the value of these texts at the time and their importance today.

Saturday – Technologies

We'll begin with a session titled, 'what was writing in medieval England?', learning about the different kinds of writing produced from the start of the Anglo-Saxon period all the way through to the end of the Middle Ages. The surviving written forms from this era vary greatly – from hastily scratched graffiti to elaborately designed monuments, and from marginal scribbles to deluxe manuscripts. We'll look at wall paintings, carved stone crosses, runic inscriptions and wax tablets, considering what these marks made by brush, pen, stylus and axe tell us about how the inhabitants of medieval England might have encountered writing.

In the afternoon we will think about the technology of the manuscript. Participants will learn about how parchment was made, and how a manuscript was bound, copied and decorated. We'll conclude the day by thinking about the arrival of printing in England in the 1470s and look at the effect it had on manuscript culture.

Sunday – Meanings

Building on the previous day's material, our first session will consider 'what is a writer'? In this session we'll encounter some of the most iconic authors from the period: Chaucer, Alfred the Great, Julian of Norwich (who wrote the first work in English that we can be sure was written by a woman) and the enigmatic Anglo-Saxon poet, Cynewulf, who left riddling runic signatures in his poems. But, we will also look at a host of fascinating anonymous scribes – by turns devout and grumpy, whose dedicated labours ensured that some of the most important texts of the medieval period were disseminated. We will also think about readers and annotators, asking what their notes tell us about how and why they read.

In the afternoon we'll think about forms of reception. How did audiences encounter *Beowulf* and Chaucer? And what does the story of the earliest named English poet tell us about poetry and performance? Finally, we will consider how texts were valued – both as material objects and repositories of wisdom – through examples ranging from Viking raids to amulet charms.

Tutors

Dr Victoria Symons was a teaching fellow in medieval literature at University College London until 2017. Her research focuses on runes, writing and textuality in the medieval period, as well as modern adaptations of medieval literature. Her monograph, *Runes and Roman Letters in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, was published in 2016. She now works for The Brilliant Club, a charity that works to give students from under-represented backgrounds a better chance at applying to highly selective universities.

Dr Mary Wellesley studied English Literature at Lincoln College, Oxford before moving to University College London to pursue post-graduate research. Her doctoral thesis examined the manuscripts of the *Life of Our Lady* by the Benedictine monk and poet, John Lydgate (c.1370–1450). She has published articles and chapters on aspects of Middle English literature and codicology and co-edited *Stasis in the Medieval West* for Palgrave. Mary is passionate about communicating medieval history to the widest possible audience. She spent 2017 developing the medieval section of the British Library's Discovering Literature online resource, which showcases the library's medieval English literary collections. Alongside her academic work, she also writes and reviews for non-academic publications. Her work has appeared in *The London Review of Books*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, amongst others. Her book, *The Manuscripts That Made Us* is under contract with Quercus.

Required Reading

Preparatory reading will be circulated prior to the beginning of the course.

Previous skills, knowledge or experience

None required. A willingness to participate in group discussion, and to undertake the preparatory reading, will help you get the most from this course.

Facilities and refreshments

Please note that the Learning Centre will open to participants 15 minutes before the stated course start time. Tea and coffee will be served at the beginning of each day. Participants will need to make their own arrangements for lunch.

On Sunday 4 August please meet at Gate 5 on Midland Road at 10.15 to be escorted in the Library.
Further instructions about Sunday entry will be provided on Saturday.
