

**Charles Clark, Bard of Totham, and the Materiality of Book Consumption**

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When Charles Clark of Great Totham Hall, in Essex, died in 1880, he left behind him a library of some 2500 volumes. One of the books in his collection was the manuscript that is now British Library, Egerton 2433, a volume which was bound between boards sometime in the nineteenth-century. We know that it belonged to Clark because he pasted his unique bookplate poem, which is dated by hand 1859, on the inside cover. This material act of appropriation by Clark, who was a gentleman farmer, printer and publisher, and an antiquarian and a collector of books, is the physical embodiment of the medievalism that pervades the long nineteenth century, creating a visual interface between the medieval manuscript book and the Romantic and Victorian zeal for retrospection. And it creates, at once, a challenge to the way in which we now appreciate this rather workmanlike manuscript, for when Clark pasted his bookplate poem into Egerton 2433, he not only changed it physically; he altered too the *sense* of the book, from an artefact of a time past to a living, circulating and valuable repository of knowledge. In so doing, Clark gives us the real, material evidence of the interface: the common boundary, or interaction, between two great literary and historical periods, a connection that is frequently imagined or fictionalised in the Romantic period by Scott, Keats and others, and physically imitated and reinterpreted by Victorians such as William Morris.

This paper is concerned with the actual book consumption of Clark, realised in his physical, eclectic collection of medieval manuscripts, printed books and ephemera; his printing of tracts and curiosities from the past at his private press at Great Totham; and ultimately with the conflation and representation of both activities in the bookplate poem – which was both pasted into his books and circulated publicly, as revelatory of his relationship with the material book and with its consumption, preservation, and re-mediation.