

Prologue to The Canterbury Tales
By

Geoffrey Chaucer[1343-1400]

Prologue to Canterbury Tales

- ▶ Geoffrey Chaucer(1343-1400),the father of English literature & language wrote his magnum Opus 'The Canterbury Tales' in between 1387 and 1400.
- ▶ It is said that he was inspired to write a narrative tale of 14th C. English life by the Italian master Boccaccio.
- ▶ 'The Canterbury Tales' is modeled after 'Decameron'.
- ▶ However, David Daiches holds that Chaucer was inspired by the 'Novelle' of Giovanni Sercombe and most probably he had never seen "Decameron".
- ▶ On 15th of April 1387 a group of 29 pilgrims arrived at the Tabard Inn, South work to undertake a pilgrimage to the Canter bury Cathedral to pay homage to St. Thomas Beckett.
- ▶ Chaucer joined the group along with the Inn Keeper Harry Bailey.
- ▶ They began their pilgrimage on the dawn of 16th April and reached the holy shrine on the evening of 18th April.
- ▶ They had to ride through the undefined road of nearly 101 miles.
- ▶ At present the distance between South work and Canterbury is 60 k.m

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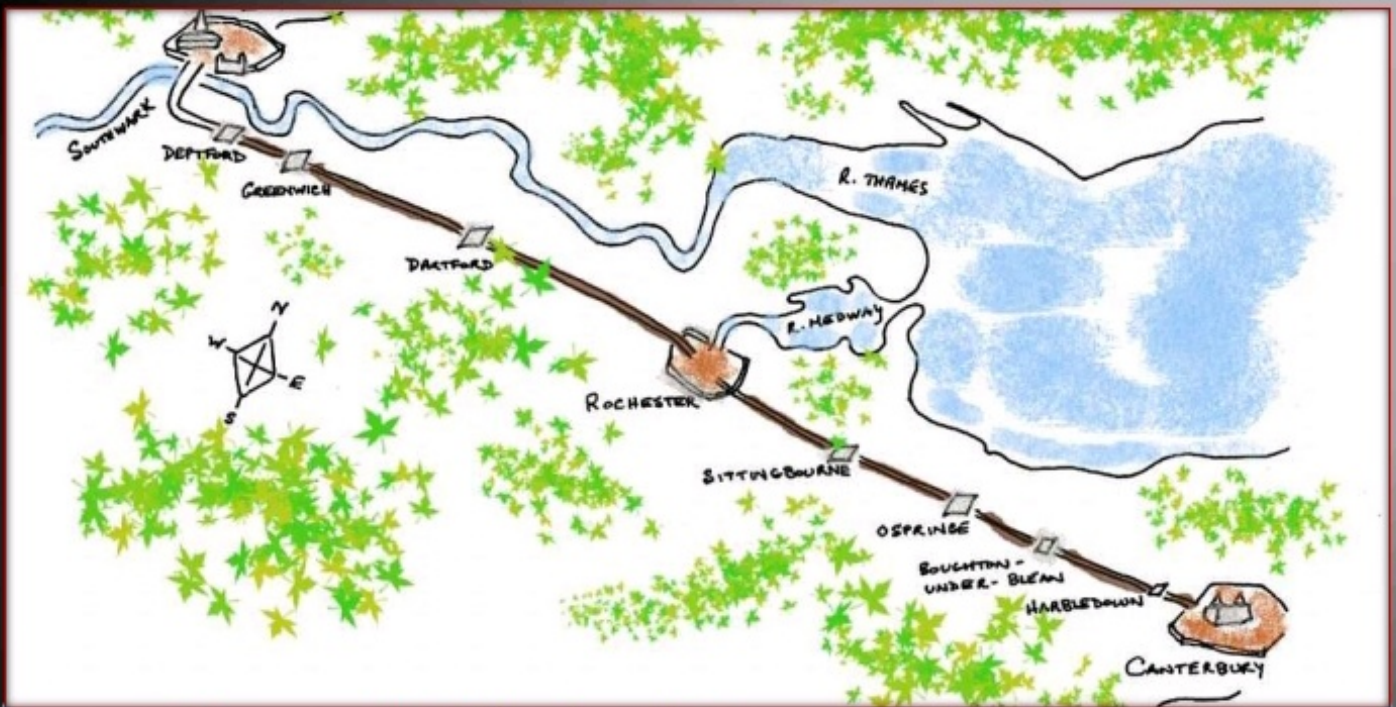
The Canterbury Cathedral



A section of Chaucer's Pilgrims en-route

There were 30 pilgrims PLUS Chaucer and the Host. Twenty-nine meet at the Tabard, and the 30th joins on the way. Chaucer goes along as a naive observer--a "reporter,"

The Host, Harry Bailey, goes along as (1)the guide; (2) the one who suggests the idea of telling stories on the way to Canterbury and on the return from Canterbury to pass the time; (3)the judge for the best tale--the winner will receive a sumptuous feast paid for by the rest of the pilgrims.



Chaucer's Pilgrims' Route to Canterbury

The distance between London & Canterbury was 101 miles in Chaucer's time; It required 3 days of hard travel on Horse-back.



The Tabard Inn

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- ▶ Chaucer had an intention of writing altogether 120 stories.[$30 \times (2+2) = 120$]
- ▶ But, he could write only 22 complete and 2 incomplete stories, making the total of 24 because of his physical ailments and disturbed Royal patronages.
- ▶ He narrated the tales from the perspective of an omniscient narrator.
- ▶ Chaucer's pilgrims represented almost all the social classes of 14th Century England excluding the highest and the lowest.
- ▶ The pilgrims were not religious people in the true sense of the term.
- ▶ Here, we shall see only three pilgrims—the Knight, the Squire and the Wife of Bath.

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Twenty nine pilgrims along with Chaucer, the author and Hairy Bailey, the Inn-Keeper at the supper in the Tabard Inn on the night of 16th April, 1387.

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- ▶ The Knight led the pilgrimage. He was an ideal Knight having all the characteristic virtues of a medieval knight.
- ▶ He was a courageous soldier having experiences of fighting in 15 mortal battles.
- ▶ He fought in the Crusades and beheaded three enemy leaders.
- ▶ He was wise and honest.
- ▶ He was not interested in showmanship.
- ▶ He was as meek and gentle as a maid.



The Knight

The Knight

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- ▶ The Squire is portrayed in line no.79 to 100 in the General Prologue. He is the second pilgrim Chaucer introduces in the General Prologue. He is the Knight's son and companion in this pilgrimage. He tells his tale eleventh, after the Merchant and before the Franklin. He's a pretty good squire and rides a horse well, can joust well, and he can even carve the meat for the Knight well at dinner. The Franklin praises him as a perfect Youngman.
- ▶ The Squire is a teenager, a bit of a pretty boy, and prone to serious infatuations that keep him up all night. He represents both youthfulness and femininity.

The Squire

The Squire

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The Wife of Bath

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- ▶ The Wife of Bath's portrait is the fifteenth in the *General Prologue*. She is the sixth to tell her tale, after the *Man of Law* and before the *Friar*. She is considered as the first round character in English literature.
- ▶ The Wife of Bath is Chaucer's most delightful character. She is a skilled weaver who even surpasses the weavers of Ypres and Ghent. She thinks highly of herself and loses all patience if anybody dares to precede her in making an offering. She is garishly dressed. She wears scarlet red stockings and supple new shoes. Her handkerchiefs are of the finest weave and weigh over ten pounds. Chaucer mentions that she has been married five times and has had innumerable affairs in her youth. She has traveled widely and has been on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, Bologna, Galicia and Cologne. She is gap-toothed and rides her gentle ambling horse easily. It was believed in the Middle Ages that a gap-toothed person would be very lucky and travel far and wide. The lengthy description of her travels indicates that she has led a fairly comfortable life. She wears a riding skirt round her large hips and a pair of sharp spurs on her heels. She knows how to enjoy herself in company and her special forte lies in her knowledge of all the cures of love. Her knowledge about the remedies of love is probably a reference to Ovid's "*Amor Remedia*".
- ▶ She is the first feminist character in English Literature and appeals for the liberation of women in her tale. She is a charming, lively, energetic character.

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The Tabard Inn



Geoffrey Chaucer

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- ▶ April 16 - Assembly at the Tabard Inn
- ▶ April 17 - Sunrise (About 4:45)/The journey begins. They spend the night at Dartford, which is about 15 miles from London.
- ▶ April 18 - Sunrise/The journey continues. They spend the night at Rochester, which is about 30 miles from London.
- ▶ April 19 - Sunrise/The journey continues. They spend the night at Ospringe, which is 46 miles from London and 10 miles from Canterbury.
- ▶ April 20 - Sunrise/The journey is over. They arrive in Canterbury, and the Parson begins his sermon at about 4:00 p.m.
- ▶ Today, the distance from Southwark to Canterbury is about 60 miles, 3 days of hard travel by horseback.
- ▶ In the 14th c. roads were not as good or easy to travel as today. However, since most of the pilgrims probably walked I'm not sure how long it took.

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