

# Unravelling the mysteries of medieval Gough Map

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Digitized Gough Map

The secrets embedded in one of the earliest maps to show Britain in its geographically recognised form have been uncovered, as researchers launch the newly digitised Gough Map.

Through the Linguistic Geographies project, team members from the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London have created a fully interactive, digital, online version of the enigmatic Gough [Map](#) which uses fluid zooming, panning and pop-ups to deliver the Map image at an enormous size, giving a level of detail that is considerably better than could be seen with the naked eye.

The Gough Map is drawn on two pieces of sheepskin and is around 45 ins long. It shows Great Britain on its side, before the convention of maps pointing north, and details green rivers and red-roofed cathedrals.

Paul Vetch, from the Department of Digital Humanities at King's, said: "The Gough Map is a fascinating document from any number of different disciplinary perspectives - history, linguistics, palaeography, cartography, to name but a few - and our aim was to try and deliver it in a way which would make it available for as many modes of interrogation as possible."

Now the digitized Map has enabled the team to offer a re-interpretation of its origins, purpose and production, which have up to now been shrouded in mystery. It had previously been thought the Map dated back to 1360, but detailed analysis of the small differences in English handwriting over the period has shown that it was actually first produced in 1375.

It has also been revealed that the Map is the result of the work of two scribes from different centuries, not one as previously thought, and the amendments and alterations made by each give fascinating insights into the political and sociological trends of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The text written by the original scribe is best preserved in Scotland and the area north of Hadrian's Wall, whereas the text written by the reviser is found in south-eastern and central England, demonstrating the shift in political power. London and York are both labelled in gold lettering and lavish illustrations decorate the names of the many other medieval towns.

The buildings in Scotland do not have windows or doors, whereas buildings in the revised area of the map, south of Hadrian's Wall, have both.

The Department of Digital Humanities is an international leader in the application of technology in the arts and humanities, and in the social

sciences. Paul Vetch said: "One of our primary aims was to make this hugely significant Map accessible to as wide an audience as possible. Using web-based maps (like Google Maps or Bing) has become second nature for most of us now, and we aimed to publish the Map online in a format that would be equally intuitive and easy for people to use."

The fully searchable Map allows users to browse by place name - both current and medieval - but also by geographical features. Highlighting a location enables viewers to click on it and bring up a fact box revealing all sorts of information from geographical appearance to the etymology of the place name - even a cross reference to the real Google maps.

The team now hopes that the digitised Gough Map will be used by other researchers to develop further lines of enquiry on the Map and on other medieval maps and mapmaking.

**More information:** [www.goughmap.org/](http://www.goughmap.org/)

Provided by King's College London

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