

Earliest medieval map of Britain put online

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A fifteen-month research project of the earliest surviving geographically recognizable map of Great Britain, known as the Gough Map, provides some revealing insights into one of the most enigmatic cartographic pieces from the Bodleian collections.

The fifteen-month AHRC-funded project used an innovative approach that explores the map's 'linguistic geographies', that is the writing used on the map by the scribes who created it, with the aim of offering a re-interpretation of the Gough Map's origins, provenance, purpose and creation of which so little is known. Although the identity of the map-maker is unknown, it is now possible to reveal that the text on the Gough Map is the work of at least two scribes: the original 14th-century scribe and a 15th-century reviser.

One of the key investigations based on historical reference and the handwriting on the map was to date the map more accurately. The project has discovered that the map was made closer to 1375, rather than in 1360 as was previously thought.

There are visible differences between recorded details in Scotland and England. For example: 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. The buildings in Scotland do not have windows and doors, whereas in the revised part of the map, essentially everywhere south of Hadrian's Wall, most buildings have both windows and doors.

Throughout, towns are shown in some detail, the lettering for London and York coloured gold, while other principal medieval settlements such as Bristol, Chester, Gloucester, Lincoln, Norwich, Salisbury and Winchester are lavishly illustrated.

One of key outcomes of Linguistic Geographies is to make available online a searchable version of the Gough Map based upon a digital image of the map. The website features a zoomable, pan-able digital version of the Gough Map - this map is fully searchable and browse-able by place name (current and medieval), and also by geographical features. Once clicking on a chosen location, information regarding that location's geographical appearance, etymology, appearance on earlier maps, and much, much more is revealed;

The website also includes a series of scholarly essays discussing the map; latest news about the project and a blog, among others.

Nick Millea, Bodleian Map Librarian, said: "The project team was keen to ensure that our research findings reach the widest possible audiences, not least because maps are enduringly popular objects and always capture the imagination; medieval maps especially. To this end one of the main project outcomes is this web-resource through which the Gough Map is made more widely accessible. We hope this will help others to develop other lines of enquiry on medieval maps and mapmaking, whether in academic or non-academic sectors, as well as provide greater levels of access to the Gough [Map](#), enhancing its world-wide significance in the history of cartography."

The findings are recorded on a newly-launched website: www.goughmap.org .

This is an outcome of the collaborative project involving Queen's University Belfast, King's College London, and the Bodleian Libraries.

Provided by Oxford University

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