

Inventing Roger de Breynton via Leaflet Storymap

The totality of this semester's work converged upon the rallying cry: "we have to invent him." This semester's work meaning intensive study in digital humanities, medievalism, and biography; him being 14th century Hereford-based ecclesiastical administrator, Roger de Breynton. Roger embodies an enticing number of paradoxes that make him worth studying. He is unremarkable in many ways. He is not among the rare number of medieval subjects for whom we may find preexisting biographical materials, illustrative contemporary sources, or his own personal writings. However, we have more than we would expect for someone of his stature, in his period. It is for this reason Breynton is an exceptional case but simultaneously a proverbial everyman. We derive our moral motivation here: Breynton offers a chance to animate the life of an individual traditionally not seen worthy of the time. His presence in ecclesiastical documents affords us a factual framework for his life including his whereabouts, his professional role, and acquaintances. Now if we take license from Birkholz's suggestion that a great deal of traditional biography engages in latent fabulation, we can, with each individual project generated by the class, create a polyphonous new biography of Roger de Breynton utilizing the tools of digital humanities along the way (Birkholz 173).

When faced with the task of inventing him, I started the only place I could think given my own naturalistic proclivities: his environment. This was equal parts to enlist my own interests in our collective project to imagine the life of Roger as it was to give myself to permission to do the research necessary—ecology, geology, agricultural history—for me to understand Hereford. This mission relied on the documentary projects of people not unlike Roger; amateur botanists, spring water enthusiasts, and amateur archaeologists offered me a sufficient, ground-level understanding of what Hereford and its surrounding country had to offer. With this information

in tow, I could envision Roger's relationship to the land. As someone whose name bears their place of origin, who earned their first recognition as a field-managing Reeve, and who perhaps is only known to us because of his energetic property dealings—this seemed tantamount to none in projecting Roger's life. At the very least, in emphasizing the natural, we pay homage to the overlooked ecological foundation for the burgeoning ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Let us not forget, despite our emphasis on Roger, "Hereford is the chiefe citie of this countrie, having round about it faire meadowes; and fruitful fields" (Mercator 104-5)

However, this approach necessitates grappling a difficult task: locating the sites sparsely described in the Hereford Cathedral Muniments. Consequently, given our position as mere forerunners of this experimental project to combine graduate and undergraduate students in a course that would expose each to digital humanities, my colleague, Erin Brantmayer, and I have developed a guide for researching the sites of the HCM documents (**Appendix A**). It is our intention that the plots we have located may be used in future projects and that our guide can provide a foundation for further contextualization of 14th century Herefordshire archives. Not only did the sources contained within our procedure aid our identification, but they also provided an entryway into the expansive genealogical researching communities, the availabilities of different archives, and the efficacy of different government search tools. Each of these presenting its own histories, debates, and further resources for understanding the place and people of Hereford.

Once numerous plots named in the HCM documents were located, I needed to break from the rigidity of procedural research to recontextualize the information ascertained. Why did these spaces matter? How would Roger have interacted with them? Would they have looked the same or different? Throughout the semester as we probed the history, utility, and tools of digital

humanities, I honed my understanding of what constituted a project that I would be interested in undertaking. While the entirety of the class's work was made possible by the proto-DH initiative to translate, transcribe, and scan the HCM documents themselves, mere representation of pre-existing media did little to indulge our creative capacities or utilize the diverse disciplinary backgrounds which composed our group. Drawing inspiration from the [Greene Street Project](#), which uses a single four hundred foot block in New York City to historicize America; Rebecca Solnit's printed *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, which layers queer, botanical, and culinary histories, amongst others, atop the cityscape; and Saidiya Hartman's theorization of critical fabulation, which Hartman describes as "fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling"—I set about inventing Roger de Breynnton (Hartman 11).

However, beneath the fiction needed to lie a kernel of fact. Roger actually existed; this project must actually engage with his biography and society for it to maintain at least a façade of academic medieval studies. Beyond the presence of authentic locations of significance for Roger, I must also represent his place within the ecclesiastical strata of Herefordshire, while extrapolating, as best I can, an interiority from the combination of geographic sites and historical research. Again, one encounters difficulties when they wish to recreate a time and place still shrouded in mystery. Despite Roger's best efforts to generate documentary lives for many in the county, there are many things we simply do not know.

With this landscape present, I endeavored to create a Hereford walking tour of points of relevance to Roger's life. I intended to use georeferenced maps of Hereford and the surrounding area that would support the narrative, provide visual intrigue, and enrich our understanding of

Hereford's spatial history. However, I confronted a major incompatibility while trying to build this program as an ArcGIS Storymap. Storymaps is a proprietary web program offered by ESRI, the developers of ArcGIS, that has waxed in popularity due to its ability to elegantly combine GIS data with an interactive, media-rich interface. However, these scanned maps that were to underpin my visual presentation, were only available in raster files. Raster files store information as pixels, think pictures, whereas shape, geoJSON, or others represent their maps via polygons which can be coded, symbolized, colored, and manipulated in other ways. ArcGIS does not accept raster files. Despite attempted workarounds to convert raster files to a format compatible with the program via QGIS and other online GIS tools, I ultimately decided that for the project to proceed using georeferenced maps, I would have to seek alternative means of representing the data. Thankfully, the open source Leaflet Storymap format created by Jack Dougherty and Ilya Ilyankou as part of their work in *Hands-On Data Visualization* released only two weeks ago (DH moves fast), offered a low-tech way to use georeferenced maps alongside multimedia presentations (Dougherty & Ilyankou).

The map employs different geographical disciplines as well as factual and fictionalized information about the life of Roger. The project aims to engage in our encouraged format of speculative biography while incorporating my own interest in environmental studies. The venues span diverse locales such as an ancient yew tree, a major street in Hereford, and Roger's brother's property. Roger provides commentary on each stop, providing historical background, biographical information, as well as representing Roger's story arc from boy of Breinton to esteemed administrator who has seen lands further than one from his standing could have ever dreamed. This approach balances attentiveness to Roger's life and society with the potentialities offered by digital humanities. Further, this partially fictional approach jumps unflinchingly into

the invention of interiority necessary for us to rescue Roger's life from the annals of ecclesiastical minutiae.

We begin the presentation with an immersive framing of the proceeding project. The text uses second-person narration to tell the user, "You are Roger de Breynton." This narrative voice asks the reader to perspective-take, without leaving their own interiority; rather, it merges with Roger into a synthetic whole. There will always be things that we will not know about Roger, however, by telling the reader that they are Roger we ask them to as Charles Acheson terms it, *forged memory*. Acheson writes from the field of comic studies. Forged memory relies on gutters, the spaces in between frames, as moments of unknowability that require the reader to infer, speculate, and ultimately invent their own understanding of what happened, effectively "[splitting] ownership of the experience" between reader and subject (Acheson 291). While the project attempts to suggest certain histories, feelings, and reflect Roger's positionality, the gaps in-between will be determined by the reader's imagination. Allusions to Ralph de Breynton, Richard Swinfield, Thomas Talbot, and Roger's provide ample ambiguity for memory forging. In doing this, we democratize the invention of Roger de Breynton and allow him his true status as everyman.

Themes addressed within the narrative include class anxieties, individualism, and trauma. Roger both feels proud and uncomfortable by his, up to this point, moderately successful career. While he has not climbed the ranks with as much ease as richer peers, namely Thomas Talbot, his job allowed him to escape the worst of the Great Famine. Considering Breynton comes from pastoral beginnings in Canon's Moor, the sort who were sure to be hardest hit by the famine, survival would not be taken for granted. However, survived he has and with some personal gain to boot. However, he has not overcome the famine unscathed. Throughout the walk, it is revealed

that Roger is walking to visit a yew tree next to St. Michael's Church in Breynnton. His reflections upon remembrance and prescience allow for metatextual analysis of biography and historiography—two subjects the course has sought to probe.

The project pushed me in two directions I was unfamiliar with, GIS and creative writing. While GIS I anticipated engaging with during the course, creative writing snuck its way in. Perhaps emboldened by the spirit of adventure within the course, I felt that creative writing was the only way I could incorporate my understanding of Roger de Breynnton and why it's important we study him. For the subversion of academia's problematic norms; for the proliferation of critical fabulation; to let our "what ifs" have greater play over our choices. My reliance on unpublished or hobbyist documents further spurred my desire to interiorize Roger's life. Just as people should know of Roger, people should know of the Woolhope Club, *Herefordshire Archaeology News*, and of the countless Herefordshire government records cataloging the county's rich history. These archives have people behind them and within them as well. Perhaps when the time has come when they too will have to be invented.

Appendix A

This document was produced in Spring of 2021 by a combined graduate and undergraduate English Course titled, *Digital Research Lab: Medieval*. The document's aim is to facilitate the spatial identification of the described plots in the Hereford Cathedral Muniments, which date from approx 13c to 14c, or other documents from Herefordshire in a similar temporal range.

Medieval historical studies in Hereford is indebted to the various institutions who have made the city's archival history available online. In undertaking this project, we found several tools which enabled us to better navigate Hereford's geography over time. They are compiled below, ordered by our suggested sequence of first identifying individual names, searching maps, and lastly browsing medieval histories of Hereford.

1. Name identification

- a. Not only do you have to overcome 700 years of history and the name changes that come with it, but Herefordshire's proximity to Wales means that many of its place names.

You can either attempt to find the names of specific fields based on maps of the region you suspect the field is in, however, confirming the field name via one of the resources below before you begin manually scanning maps is recommended.

- b. Below are resources for identifying name changes with their respective strengths and weaknesses.

c. Resources

- i. Place-Names of Herefordshire, Bannister (1916)
 1. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924028035693/page/n63/mode/2up>
- ii. Herefordshire Place-Names, Baddeley (1916)
 1. <https://archive.org/details/transactionsofbr39bris>
- iii. Herefordshire Through Time Historic Environmental Records
 1. There are two searches available on this website
 - a. Historic Monuments
 - i. <https://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk/her-search/monuments-search/>
 1. Monuments come with location data
 - b. Field-Names and Landowners
 - i. <https://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk/her-search/field-names-and-landowners/>

1. Fields do not come with specific location data, they are pulled from 1840s Tithe Surveys

2. Maps

- a. The primary contradiction is that the older the map you find, the less likely it is to have the details you're looking for. Primarily older maps have been useful in locating metropolitan plots, offering little for individual field names. However, they may provide some insight into past naming conventions.

- i. Maps of the city of Hereford

- ii. Lovell Johns' Medieval Streetnames

1. http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/sites/historictownsatlas/files/atlas/town/maps/hereford_map_3_medieval_street_names.pdf

- iii. John Speed 1610 Map of Hereford

1. <https://herefordshirehistory.org.uk/archive/herefordshire-historic-maps/hereford-maps/146580-plan-of-hereford-city-from-speeds-map-1610?>

- iv. Taylor's map of 1757

1. <https://herefordshirehistory.org.uk/archive/herefordshire-historic-maps/hereford-maps/512206-taylors-map-of-hereford-1757.jpg>

2. Maps of outlying field names

First, see if the modern names offer clues or continuities. View the modern Ordnance survey for the greatest detail. If inconclusive, view georeferenced maps via Old Maps Online, the National Library of Scotland, and Vision of Britain for historically georeferenced Ordnance survey maps. However, these rarely emphasize field names and do not date back further than 1815.

- a. Georeferenced

1. <https://osmaps.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/>
 - a. <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/>
 - b. <https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>
 - c. <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/maps/>

- b. Static Maps

- i. 1811-1817

1. <https://www.woolhopeclub.org.uk/maps/online-map-sources>

- ii. Herefordshire Local Government

1. <https://herefordshirehistory.org.uk/archive/herefordshire-historic-maps/hereford-maps?>
 - iii. David Rumsey Collection
 1. https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/view/search?showAll=where&q=hereford&sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No
 3. Hereford Biography
 - a. Archaeology Data Service Library
 - i. <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/index.xhtml>
 - b. Historic Town Atlas
 - i. <http://www.historictownsatlas.org.uk/atlas/volume-i/historic-towns/hereford>
 - c. Woolhope
 - i. Herefordshire Archaeological News
 - ii. <https://www.woolhopeclub.org.uk/>
 - d. Ewyas Lacy
 - i. <http://www.ewyaslacy.org.uk/>
 - e. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1438/historic-townscape-of-central-herefordpdf>
 4. Future Sites of Expansion

These are resources not available online, but may be worth investigating in the future.

 - a. Hereford Archives
 - i. <https://archive-catalogue.herefordshire.gov.uk/>
 - b. 1840s Tithe Maps
 - i. <http://geoffgwatkinmaps.co.uk/>
 - ii. Some are available here: <http://www.bosci.net/hhp.html>
 - c. Herefordshire Place-Names, Copple-Stone (2009)

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Appendix B

Link to project: <https://jackrouse21.github.io/roger-de-breynton/>

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