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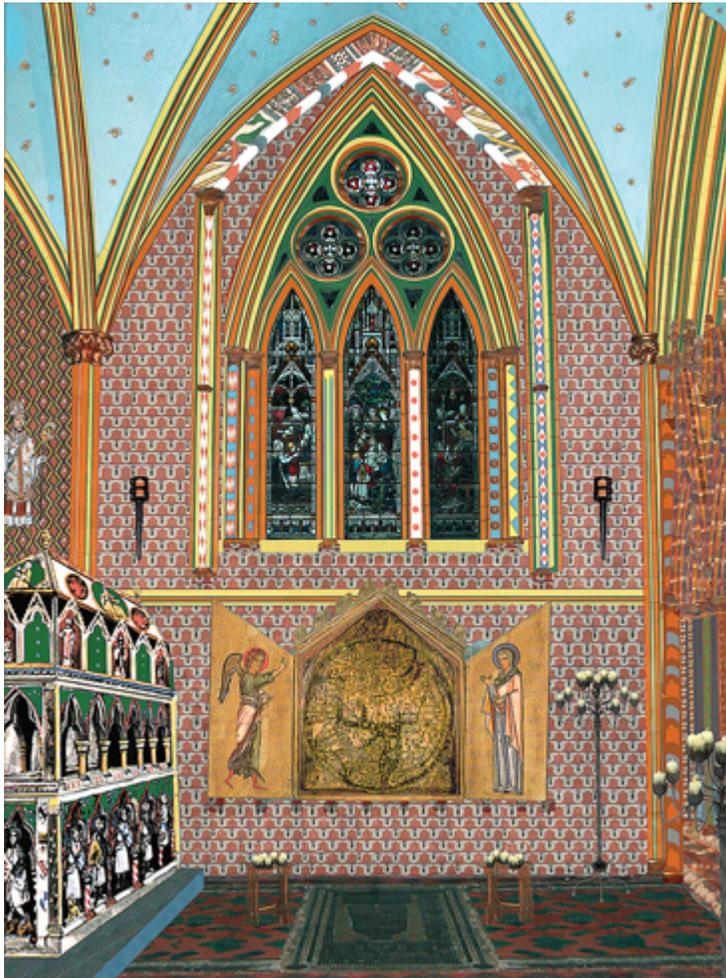
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Careful investigation and a bit of luck yield map's secrets

Story by Rachel Hatch



Artist Spencer Sauter '70 created a “speculative reconstruction” (shown above) of Hereford’s north transept as it appeared in the late 13th century, with the *Mappa Mundi* a perfect fit at its center.

depict the history of mankind and marvels of the natural world.

While scholars consider Herford’s *Mappa Mundi* to be among the most important medieval English maps, for centuries there were no firmly grounded theories about its original placement or purpose. That changed when Terkla published detailed evidence intended to clear up the centuries-old mystery.

Late in the 13th century, weary pilgrims traveled on foot for miles to Hereford, an English town on the Wales border. The destination of these pilgrims was Hereford Cathedral. Bathed in medieval colors and containing relics and sacred treasures, the cathedral hosted the remains of its patron saint, Ethelbert, and one of its bishops, St. Thomas de Cantilupe, who was canonized 40 years after death, in part due to the number of miracles that were said to have occurred at his tomb.

Chief among the cathedral’s treasures is its *Mappa Mundi* — a giant map of the world. Drawn on a single sheet of vellum (calf skin), the map is contained within a 52-inch circle and reflects the thinking of the medieval church, with Jerusalem at its center.

By modern standards, “it’s no good as a map, really,” says IWU Professor of English Dan Terkla, who has studied the map for nearly a decade. “It’s more metaphysical. It’s meant for people to compare their life journeys to those of the saints.” Included on the map are some 1,000 drawings that

Terkla's thesis is that the map "was originally exhibited in 1287 next to the first shrine of St. Thomas Cantilupe in Hereford's north transept. It did not function as an altarpiece, therefore, but as part of what I call the Cantilupe pilgrimage complex."

In his second-floor office in the English House, Terkla explains the concept in simpler terms: "Think of it like a giant neon sign for medieval pilgrims," he says with a smile.

Terkla, who has a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of California, joined Illinois Wesleyan's faculty in 1995. Although his expertise includes medieval literature, art, and culture, Terkla says, "I'm not an art historian by any means." Instead, he approached the study of the Hereford's *Mappa Mundi* in much the same way that he examines medieval literature. "I started to pay attention to the way the map was put together, and then asked why the map was made, when, and by whom."



A detail from *Mappa Mundi* shows Nicodoxus, Teodocus, and Policlitus, who were sent by Augustus Caesar to survey the inhabited world.

That these questions have waited so long for answers is partly due to Hereford Cathedral's sometimes volatile history.

Over the centuries, wars and other calamities damaged many parts of the cathedral, including the shrine holding the remains of St. Thomas. Subsequent restoration efforts were often misguided. During an 18th-century refurbishment, many artifacts near Cantilupe's shrine were discarded. "They cleaned it off," Terkla says sadly. "It was once a pretty elaborate space."

At some point, the *Mappa Mundi* was also moved. It has been on display for years in another room of Hereford, sealed in a protective case. Stationed at a desk not far from this case was Dominic Harbour, now Hereford's head of communications and marketing, and friend of Terkla's for a number of years.

"When I first showed interest in knowing more about the map, Dominic was a great help in getting access to various parts of the church," says Terkla. "He had keys to every room in the church. We were able to tromp through rooms at the cathedral no one has been in for a while."

It was Harbour who contacted Terkla in December 2003 with the news that the map's wooden backboard, which had been found in the former cathedral stable, was to come off display for dendrochronological dating. Terkla brought on board his friend Spencer Sauter '70, a freelance artist and IWU adjunct art teacher, who was interested in the map. Terkla, Sauter, and Harbour were able to examine, measure, and photograph the backboard. Sauter superimposed images of the map onto photos of the backboard using a computer program. Based on the compiled evidence, "it was clear to me that the map fit the wood," says Terkla.

His next step was to explore where the map may have originally hung. Terkla noticed stone inserts in the east wall by Cantilupe's tomb, which appeared to him to be supports that could have held up the map. "When I inquired, no one knew about them," says Terkla. "Even the mason who remodeled the tomb never noticed them." The map being next to Cantilupe "made theological sense," he adds, since the map's depiction of the Last Judgment features the Virgin Mary, to whom Cantilupe had dedicated himself.

"As it turned out, the width of the nine inserts' span aligned nicely," says Terkla, who noted the height from the floor would have put the map at an ideal viewing level. "That also aligns the griffin and sphinx on the map with the griffin and sphinx carved on Cantilupe's tomb," he adds.

Terkla had a small, but very important, discovery on his hands. But he suspected he would need more than measurements and a row of stone inserts to convince his peers.

During their 2003 visit to Hereford, Terkla took photos of the backboard, onto which Sauter once again superimposed images of the map, this time placing it in the transept. "Being an artist, I was able to visually create what the tomb may have looked like," says Sauter. Terkla used Sauter's images in several papers he wrote on the subject — including one that caught the eye of the Very Rev. Michael Tavinor, dean of the Hereford Cathedral.

"I was particularly interested in Terkla's thesis that *Mappa Mundi* may have formed part of the 'pilgrimage complex' around the shrine of St. Thomas Cantilupe at the end of the 12th century," says Dean Tavinor, who could immediately see the potential of applying Terkla's findings to his own plans "to refurbish the shrine of St. Thomas."



Terkla and Michael Tavinor, dean of Hereford Cathedral, discussed plans to renovate the Shrine of St. Thomas using Terkla's discoveries about the map's original placement.

"It's amazing to be part of a process that started centuries ago, and still continues today," Sauter says of ongoing refurbishing of the cathedral.

In December, Terkla and Sauter were bestowed a rare honor: lunch at the cathedral Deanery to discuss what place the map held in Dean Tavinor's vision for the shrine's renovations.

"He's a man with a plan," says Terkla, who was overwhelmed by the graciousness of Dean Tavinor, a ranking official in the Church of England. Before a formal luncheon prepared by the dean himself, the two were led to a computer to see the dean's plans for the tomb and north transept.

Plans were already under way for a canopy over the shrine of Cantilupe. These plans now

include placing a reproduction of the *Mappa Mundi* in the canopy, replacing an initial image of the cathedral.

“Of course, it won’t be the original map,” explains Terkla. “But I am just thrilled the dean thinks my ideas make sense enough to get an image of the map to the part of the church where it was originally displayed.” The map will be one of several elements honoring Cantilupe. A large tapestry telling the life of the saint is also planned.

Letting modern-day visitors see how the map was originally used is vital to understanding more than the architecture of the church, says Terkla. “Restoring the medieval complex gives us a better sense of the history, of who these people were and how they thought,” he says. “It gets people to think beyond the paint and canvas. It builds bridges to how life functioned in medieval times, and I think that’s terrific.”