

# Saints, Sinners and Storytellers

## Wollaton Medieval Manuscripts at the University of Nottingham

Heldris de Cornuälle, the author of *Le Roman de Silence*, pictured seated, one hand on open book on desk, early 13th Century (WLC/LM/6 f.188).

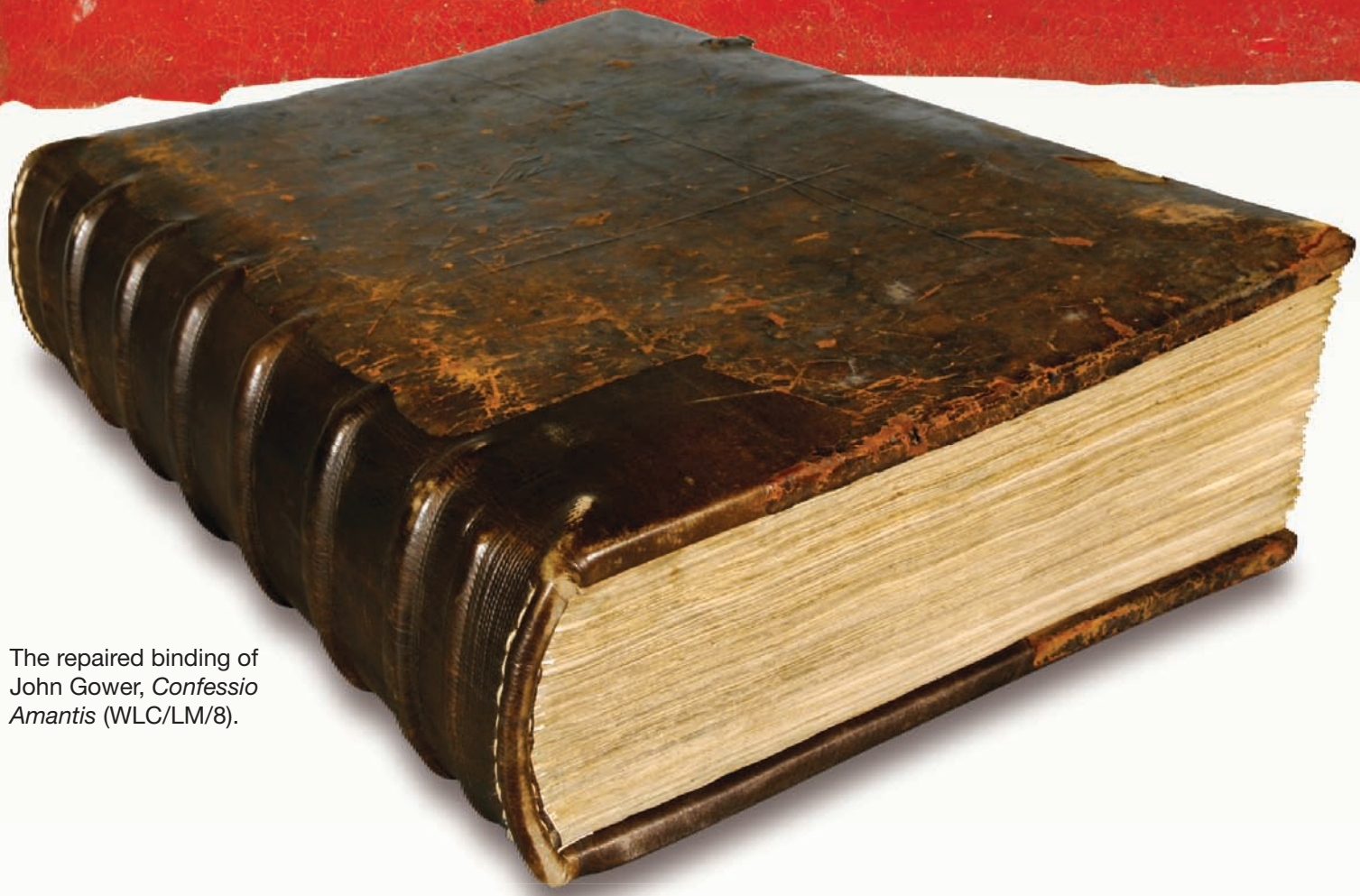


The suburban village of Wollaton, lying to the west of Nottingham, has a rich medieval heritage. Wollaton Hall, now a museum within public park land, was once the home of the Willoughby family. The modern hall, a magnificent statement of Tudor gentry aspiration, was built by Sir Francis Willoughby (1546-1596). In the Old Hall an impressive library collection already existed. Sir Richard Willoughby (d.1471) was particularly active in its development, and also ensured that his parish church was equipped with fine service books.



Brass of Richard Willoughby with his armorial shield in Wollaton Church, commissioned in 1466.

Books are very vulnerable to loss and decay, and inevitably many medieval volumes have disappeared or were dispersed over the centuries. This exhibition is based on eleven surviving manuscripts that have been the subject of extensive research, conservation and other activities at the University of Nottingham since 2007. Ten manuscripts now form part of the Wollaton Library Collection, which also includes early printed books from the original library. They are here joined by the Wollaton Antiphonal, which was returned to St Leonard's church in 1924, after being held since the Reformation period as part of the Wollaton Hall library.

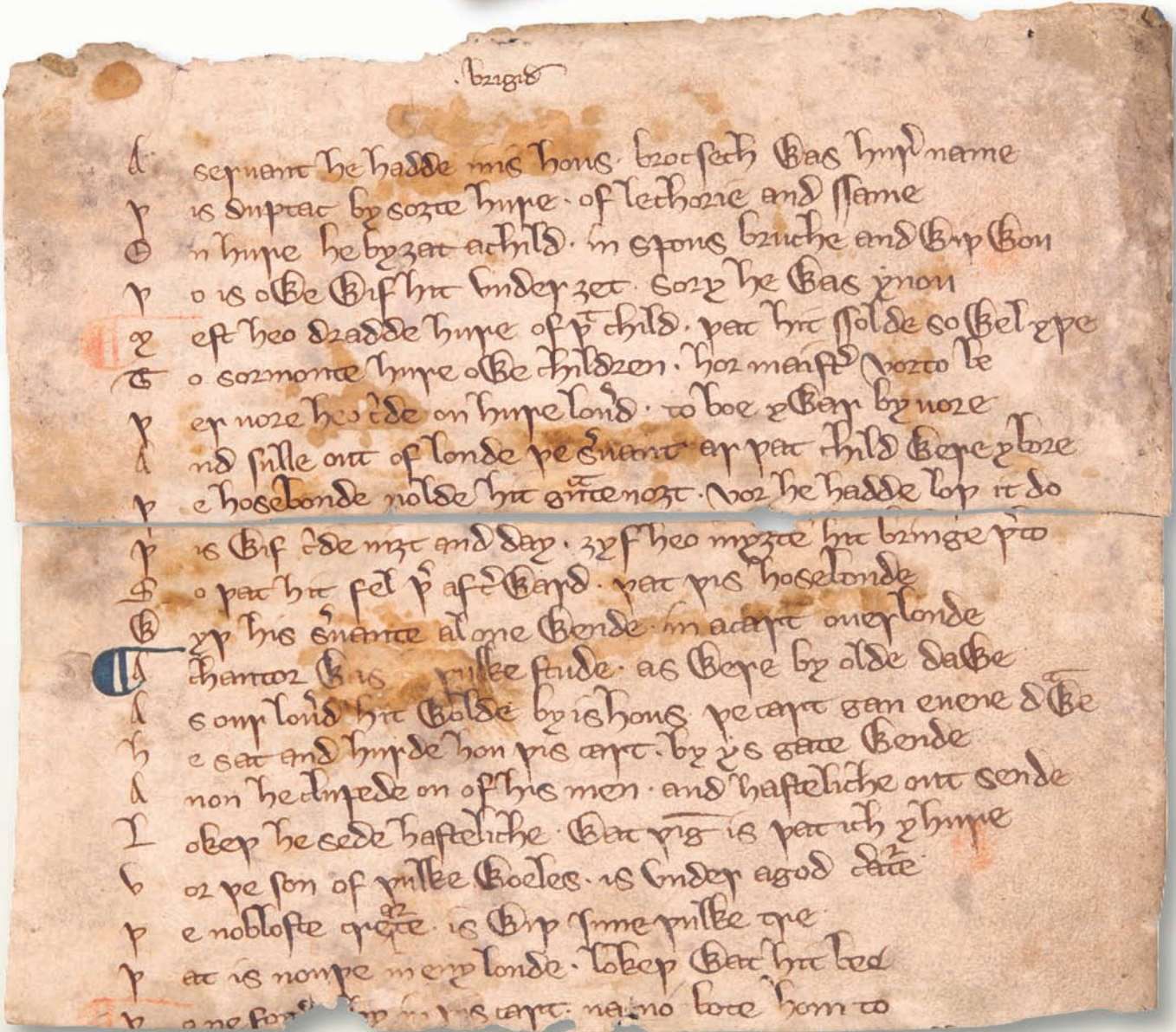


The repaired binding of John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* (WLC/LM/8).

The manuscripts in question vary from a collection of French romances to a parchment fragment used in a later book binding. They offer us glimpses into many aspects of medieval life and culture: stories of knights and their quests; works of learning and instruction in moral conduct; and records of saints and of religious practice. They use the contemporary languages of English, French and Anglo-Norman as well as Latin. Occasionally they tell us something of their authors. Examined as physical artefacts, they show both beauty and utility. Their identity as a group helps us to understand more about regional medieval book ownership and use.



The image of a fool with a club, introducing Psalm 52, was a familiar convention. *Wollaton Antiphonal* (MS 250 f.228v).



Fragment of the *South English Legendary*, c.1310 (WLC/LM/38).

This display has been curated by the Wollaton Library Collection research team, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and by curators in the University's Manuscripts and Special Collections department, who with Heritage Lottery Fund support have been working to conserve the manuscripts and raise awareness of their importance. Particular thanks are due to Professor Thorlac Turville-Petre, Professor Ralph Hanna, and Dr Gavin Cole.

