

*A Grete Miracle of a Knight Good Called Sir Roger Wallysborow*¹

(Student Edition)

Ed. Siobhain Bly Calkin

Text From:

London, British Library, MS Harley 2252 (The Commonplace Book of John Colyns)², folios 50v-51v.

Manuscript images available online from the British Library at:
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_2252_fs001r

Editing Principles

- capitalization and punctuation have been normalized and/or inserted according to modern practices; spelling has been normalized to modern Canadian practices
- some ampersands have been expanded to “and”
- abbreviations have been silently expanded
- square brackets mark other editorial insertions and changes
- some glosses have been provided for student users unfamiliar with Middle English
- for a transcription, see the other PDF attached to this catalogue entry; the transcription may be preferable for Middle English scholars interested in the text

(Fol. 50v) Some time there was a knight dwelling in Cornwall whose name was Sir Roger Wallysborowgh, the which with great devotion went on pilgrimage unto the Holy Land to seek the Holy Cross. And [he] went *thedyr** & did his pilgrimage *afore** the said Cross. He made his petitions unto almighty God & besought him and that holy relic that he might obtain and have a piece of the said Cross, & that he might not *therewith** be *espied*.*

Then the thigh of the said Sir Roger itched so sore that he *was fayne** to claw his thigh. And then his thigh opened & by that he knew that the pleasure of Our Lord was [that] he should obtain his desire. And [he] cut a piece of the said Cross & laid it on his thigh and it closed over & was [w]hole. And when the said Sir Roger should depart he was searched and all his clothes put from him, and all they could not find the said piece of the Cross on him which they lacked.³

[A]nd then he departed towards his country and took ship. And when they had sailed *iiij** days & nights there came a great wind and tempest in the sea so that they drew *lot[s]* who should be thrown *over the borde** in to the sea. Whereupon the lot fell on the said Sir Roger that he should be cast over in to the sea. And then Sir Roger besought them all that he might make his prayers unto almighty God *er he were** so cast over. And as soon as he began his prayers the *weder** ceased. And *on[e] of the ship** went up to the top of the ship and spied land. And the said

* thither (= there)

* before

* with it

* spied, seen

* desired

* *iii* (Roman numeral for three)

* overboard

* before he was

* weather (implies the bad weather)

* one from the ship; one of the shipmen

Sir Roger besough[t] them that he might be set on land in the next place that they might come to. Then had they the [Fol. 51r] fairest *wedyr** & wind as might be. And thereupon shortly they landed him.⁴

And when he came to land he had great *luste** to sleep. And so upon the strand of the sea he landed and found a fair country and under an hedge there he *fell on sleep** on a Sunday in the morning. And when the priest of the same parish that he slept in was at the *sakaryng** of the high mass there came a dove all white flying in to the said parish church. And at the *levacyan** time, when the priest held over his head the Blessed Sacrament, the dove took with his bill the Blessed Sacrament and flew out of the church. And the priest turned him *sore abashed*.* And the priest with all the parish followed the dove, which dove went straight unto the *foresaid** Sir Roger Wallysborow *there as** he lay asleep and laid the Blessed Host upon the thigh of the said Sir Roger whereon the piece of the holy cross was.

And when the priest & all the parishioners came there, seeing a man there asleep, [they] marvelled. And suddenly the thigh of the said knight opened [so] that *every man** might see the piece of the holy cross. And with the noise of the people the said Sir Roger woke & was greatly *astoned** to see so much people about him. And [he] asked of them what country that was. And

* weather

* desire

* fell asleep

* the consecration of the bread and wine at a Catholic mass

* the elevation of the consecrated host and chalice at a Catholic mass

* greatly upset/perplexed/embarrassed/surprised

* aforementioned

* there where

* everyone

* astonished

they answered him & said it was Cornwall, and by their language he *aperceived** it was so, and gave thanks to God.

And with [a] procession [of the people] the priest took up the Blessed Sacrament and also the piece of the Cross, and so came to the said parish church with bells ringing & great solemnity. And when mass was done, the same Sir Roger gave a piece of the said Cross to the same parish. And ever since [Fol. 51v.] the same parish *hath** [it] and is called Cross Parish.⁵ And the said Sir Roger gave all the *residue** of the holy cross unto Saint Buryan⁶ where a great part of his lands lay. And *at** this day the said Sir Roger is remembered and shall be *whiles** this world lasts.

* perceived

* has

* has

* remainder

* to

* while

¹ Scholars do not have a certain identification for a historical man named Roger Wallysborow or Whalesborough (spelling of proper names was more variable in the sixteenth century when this text was copied than it is now). As Jenner and Taylor note, “the only recorded Roger [in the Cornish family of Whalesborough] was a man of the fourteenth century,” though they also suggest that a Roger may have been an unrecorded ancestor of Pharam or Pharo Whalesborough, “the earliest recorded Whalesborough of any name . . . who died about 1213” (299). The extent to which this text relates to an actual person or lived event in the Holy Land is therefore not clear. See H. Jenner and T. Taylor, “Legend of the Church of the Holy Cross,” *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* 20.3-4 (1917-18): 295-309, available online at: https://books.google.ca/books?id=G5IAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA7&dq=roger+wallysborow&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q=roger%20wallysborow&f=false (go to p. 295).

² John Colyns was a mercer, a seller of textiles and sundry small items (s.v. “mercier” in *Middle English Dictionary*, available online at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>), as well as a seller of books in London in the sixteenth century. This book (London, British Library, MS Harley 2252) is a collection of items he seems to have found interesting, amusing, or useful, and is known as a commonplace book. The items range widely, from tales of knights and adventures to records of legal decisions, and from histories to more devotional texts such as this one. Carol Meale dates the assembly of this manuscript to the early sixteenth century, from items copied between 1480 and 1539-41. For more information, see Carol M. Meale, “The Compiler at Work: John Colyns and BL MS Harley 2252,” in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1983), pp. 82-103.

³ It is not clear here who is searching Roger. Other more detailed and clearly historical accounts of pilgrimage to the Holy Land produced in the fourteenth century and later depict pilgrims being subjected to such searches by the Muslim rulers of areas they visit. See, for example, the account of Niccolo da Poggibonsi, *Fra Niccolo of Poggibonsi, A Voyage Beyond the Seas (1346-50)*. Trans. T. Bellorini and E. Hoade. Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1945, pp. 8, 84. Another fourteenth-century account, however, written by James of Verona, describes how he takes pieces of the Holy Sepulchre while his friends distract the Greek Christian custodians of the devotional site: see James of Verona (Jacopo da Verona), “Le pèlerinage du moine augustin Jacques de Vérone (1335). » Ed. R. Röhricht. In *Revue de l’Orient latin* 3 (1895) : 155-302, p. 186, available online at :<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k220817b/f157.item>. However, as discussed in Chapter 8 of Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Narratives of Impassioned Things*, the surveillance and monitoring of pilgrim bodies in Christian pilgrimage narratives from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries is most often associated with the Muslim rulers of the Holy Land.

⁴ As discussed in more detail in Calkin, *Narratives of Impassioned Things*, chapter 8, this event resembles the Old Testament story of Jonah in some ways, though it differs in important respects (e.g. Roger is not swallowed by a whale). See Jonah 1.

⁵ According to Jenner and Taylor, the only Church of the Holy Cross in all Cornwall, “except for a late and not very important chapel and burial-ground of the Guild of the Holy Rood at Bodmin” was “the old church of Grade, mainly a Norman building, which was pulled down in 1862” (302-3). This church is interesting as a potential historical link to the tale of Roger Wallysborow because it seems to have changed from being known as the “ecclesia Sancte Grade” [the Church of St Grade] to being known as the “Ecclesia Sanctae crucis” [Church of the Holy Cross] during the late thirteenth century, although it often gets listed under both names in subsequent church records (see Jenner and Taylor 302-3).

⁶ The reference to Saint Buryan, according to Jenner and Taylor, supports a historical element to this narrative since “as early as 1213 the Whalesborough family owned the manor of Tresider in th[e] parish [of Saint Buryan]” in Cornwall (p. 304; see also 308).