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Accent placed on tracing our regional dialect

THE West Midlands' linguistic heritage is set to be explored in a new research project comparing the way today's residents speak to text from an ancient medieval manuscript originating from the area.

The research by the University of Birmingham is looking at how far people in the region share the language of their predecessors captured in the Vernon Manuscript, the biggest surviving late-medieval English manuscript.

Written in the West Midlands dialect around 1400AD, the lavishly illustrated document contains more than 350 texts spread over 700 pages and weighs a whopping 22kg.

Made up of a collection of poetry and prose, the manuscript was created by two regional scribes aiming to make religious texts accessible to local non-Latin speakers.

Researchers were staging sessions in Wolverhampton and Walsall to invite the viewing of images of pages from the manuscript and reading of some of the texts, putting today's accents to the test and unlocking their origins.

Forgotten

Sessions were being held in Wolverhampton Library yesterday and at Walsall Museum's education room in Lichfield Street today and tomorrow.

Research scholar, Luke Darbyshire from the university's English department, said: "The Vernon Manuscript is an important, but forgotten, aspect of our local culture and history.

"We are investigating the relationship between the dialect of the Vernon Manuscript and the language of the modern West Midlands.

"We are expecting to find that some common regional pronunciations and dialectical features present today stem from the medieval English used at the time of the manuscript."

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