Research

Peer Review:

This is a peer-reviewed article in *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

Open Access:

Digital Studies/Le champ numérique is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

RESEARCH

GEMMS (Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons 1530–1715): Confronting the Challenges of Sermons Research

Anne James and Jeanne Shami

University of Regina, CA
Corresponding author: Anne James (anne.james@uregina.ca)

This essay describes the first phase of the GEMMS project (2014–2019), the purpose of which is to increase access to early modern English manuscript sermons and sermon notes (1530–1715) by creating a freely accessible online bibliographic database of records for these materials. It reviews the need for this resource, the current state of its development, and the challenges and successes to date as well as proposed developments in its next phase.

Keywords: sermons; manuscripts; bibliographic databases; sermon notes; Renaissance

Cet article décrit la première phase du projet GEMMS (2014–2019), dont l'objectif est de faciliter l'accès à des manuscrits et notes des sermons en anglais moderne naissant (1530–1715) en créant une base de données bibliographique en ligne et en libre accès des archives de ces documents. Cet article examine le besoin de cette ressource, l'état actuel de son développement, les défis et réussites jusqu'à présent, ainsi que les développements proposés pour la prochaine phase du projet.

Mots-clés: sermons; manuscrits; base de données bibliographique; notes de sermons; Renaissance

Introduction

The GEMMS project responds to a need among early modern researchers for more effective and efficient access to records of manuscript sermons scattered among numerous archives in the United Kingdom and North America. While the project's primary goal is a freely accessible, fully searchable bibliographic database, an important secondary goal is creating a community of sermon scholars who will become contributors to as well as users of this data. This essay presents the rationale for the project and discusses three challenges it confronts due to the circumstances in which these materials were created and have been collected: the vast number and geographic dispersal of the manuscripts; the inadequacies of existing bibliographic tools for locating them; and the lack of taxonomies for describing their contents. A summary of these challenges, progress to date, and future plans comprises the remainder of the essay.

The research context: Problems of access

Sermons are an important resource for early modern scholars in many academic disciplines. Early twentieth-century interest was largely confined to literary scholars who prized the sermons of well-known preachers such as John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes for their rhetorical qualities, but who ignored the vast majority of undistinguished performances (Shami 1992, 2–3). Later in the century, however, interest developed among a wider range of scholars for numerous reasons: increased popularity of literary and historical methodologies that expanded their research from a smaller group of elite texts to larger groups of more popular texts; easier access to a greater range of early modern printed texts through projects such as *Early English Books Online (EEBO)* that decrease the necessity for visiting specialized archival collections; and increased interest in oral culture, its relationship to print culture, and the circulation and reception of both print and manuscript texts.

Defined by contemporary John Deios as "the expounding of scripture and applying of it to the present state, by the working of Gods spirit in the mouth of a man called for that purpose" (Deios 1590, 139; Morrissey 2011, 50), the sermon functioned as an instrument of God, conveying saving grace to instruct, move, and convert. As lay

access to scripture in the vernacular increased, preaching by appropriately trained and licensed ministers also offered the church a means of guiding and directing individual interpretation within a communal setting. As oral performances, sermons came to function as instruments of the state as well as the church by enabling public engagement on controversial religious and political topics, but even sermons conspicuously neutral, uninspired, or mundane are best understood as "radically occasional pieces of performed writing, contingent upon the contexts [including place and auditory] in and for which they were delivered" (McCullough 2011, 213). These characteristics make them important sources of information for political, religious, and social historians, as well as theologians, church historians, and those interested in the histories of ideas, the book, performance, and women. Among non-academics, genealogists and local historians also rely upon sermon evidence.

The Reformation made sermons the dominant cultural form of early modern English literature by encouraging the proliferation and development of sermons – the most prominent of the preacher's ministerial duties – as part of the liturgy and as free-standing events, grafting these discourses onto a robust medieval tradition of Catholic preaching and sermon attendance (Carlson 2003, 254; Shami 2017, 186–7; Wabuda 2002, 26–7; Wooding 2011, 330, 332). Based upon the numbers of parishes and preaching occasions – which expanded to include not only traditional Sunday services, but also regular weekday lectures or combination lectures across the kingdom, and sermons on special public and political occasions – Godfrey Davies calculated that at least 360,000 sermons would have been preached in England and Wales between 1603 and 1640 alone (Davies 1939, 1). However, Edith Klotz's sampling of the *Short Title Catalogue (STC)* suggested that only about 1,600 of these sermons survive in print (Shami 1992, 1). While Klotz's estimate may be low, GEMMS research supports her conclusion: of the 14,000 sermons currently contained in the GEMMS database, we have so far identified fewer than 200 that were printed. The reasons for this dearth of printed sermon records likely range from preachers' disinclination or lack of time to prepare their sermons for print, to lack of demand for print copies (which were considered less efficacious than the spoken word in the early part of the period) and the sheer volume of sermons preached even by a single preacher in his career.

Moreover, those that were printed constitute an unrepresentative sample. The contingencies of history have determined that sermons by well-known preachers, those preached in larger centres, those preached on special occasions or to prominent persons, and those that stirred controversy are more likely to survive in print. In contrast, sermons preached by marginalized preachers, including Catholic priests, conforming clergy during the Interregnum and nonconformists after 1661, and Quaker women (whose sermons do not survive, although we have evidence that they were preached) (Shami 2011, 169–71), were unlikely to be authorized for print. Scholars have also become interested in traces of sermons that are entirely absent from the print record, such as notes and outlines by preachers, auditors, and readers (Hunt 2010). In other words, not only are many early modern sermons inaccessible to researchers through sources such as *EEBO*, but also relying entirely or primarily upon printed sermons may lead to limited or flawed conclusions.

Consequently, researchers, beginning with historians, began increasingly looking to manuscript sermons to provide them with a more accurate understanding of sermon culture (Cogswell 1990, 215; Eales 1996; Hughes 1987; Lake 1988; Walsham 1994). Such manuscripts exist in abundance in numerous libraries and archives but have been difficult to access systematically for three reasons: the materials are widely dispersed; they have seldom received full cataloguing by repositories; and the traces of sermons they record are enormously varied. GEMMS seeks to improve access to these materials by confronting these difficulties.

Geographic dispersal

Manuscripts frequently circulated within communities linked by their doctrinal or other affiliations, but sometimes widely separated geographically, and ministers preached in multiple locations during their careers. Some left England to seek religious freedom in America, resulting in their sermons being archived on different continents. Later acquisitions by antiquarians and collectors, and eventual dispersal to purchasing libraries, resulted in yet more scattering of manuscripts. For example, traces of sermons by the prolific late-seventeenth-century nonconformist preacher Philip Henry may be found in at least six libraries throughout England, Scotland,

and Wales (and some remain in private hands). Recently, Anne James made the serendipitous discovery that the handwriting in a volume of unattributed auditor's notes in the National Library of Scotland matched that of seven volumes in the British Library attributed to John Hall of Yorkshire (NLS MS. 1038; BL Mss. 45671–45677). How this volume became separated from the others remains unknown (and several other volumes likely remain unaccounted for). Consequently, users are required to consult multiple archives to search for sermons by specific preachers or preached in specific locations or on particular texts or occasions, with little ability to predict where they might be housed, or even if they exist.

Inadequate bibliographic access

The bibliographic tools upon which sermon scholars have traditionally relied are the catalogues, online and print, of libraries and archives. Many of these catalogues were produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when sermons by ordinary parish ministers were considered to be of little interest to researchers. These institutions also purchased quantities of manuscripts containing sermons, which were often available cheaply during the last half-century, but as they were consulted relatively infrequently in most archives, limited staffing and budgets prevented full cataloguing even of complete sermons. In the catalogues of large repositories, individual sermons were seldom itemized, unless they were known to be preached by well-known preachers. Even works by such preachers could escape attribution: John Donne's 1622 Gunpowder Plot sermon on Lamentations 4:20, corrected in his own hand, remained unattributed within British Library MS. Royal 17.B.XX until 1995, when Jeanne Shami recognized Donne's handwriting (Donne 1996). Sermon notes by unknown preachers and auditors are even less likely to have received individual attention, while sermons and sermon notes that appear in miscellanies and commonplace books are seldom described. Consequently, thousands of volumes have been briefly described in finding aids as 'A volume of sermons' or simply 'Sermon notes,' often followed by a very broad range of possible dates (Morrissey 2017).

Smaller and more specialized repositories often rely on printed catalogues that may only be consulted on-site to supplement online catalogues. For example, the

Congregational Library (housed at Dr. Williams's Library) possesses a painstakingly detailed multi-volume catalogue compiled by librarian David Powell that exists only in a single typewritten copy housed in the archive. Many such small or private libraries lack the resources to fully catalogue their manuscript collections. Helen Kemp, at the University of Essex, has recently itemized manuscript sermons in Dr. Plume's Library (to be accessible through GEMMS), a private collection where full cataloguing had not previously been possible.

Problems of classification

Given the increasing recognition of the importance of sermons in early modern culture and the growing reliance of scholars on sermons, a lack of appropriate and widely accepted taxonomies for describing these materials has become a serious problem. These include both taxonomies of the various religious positions expressed in sermons by preachers as well as the classification of the various traces left by the sermons.

Earlier twentieth-century scholarship placed sermons within the history of English prose style, leading to outmoded taxonomies that obscured the genre's complexity and bequeathed inaccurate labels (such as the anachronistic "Anglo-Catholic") to cover widely divergent sermon practitioners (Ferrell and McCullough 2000, 4; Blench 1964; Mitchell 1962; Davies 1986). Revisionist historiography has also challenged simplistic labels and distinctions (between Anglican and Puritan preachers, for example) by proposing a more nuanced spectrum of mainstream Protestant positions (Puritans, conformist Calvinists, anti-Calvinists, Laudians) and sensitivity to nonconforming sects, including Quakers, Nonconformists, Independents, Baptists, and Dissenters later in the century (Green 1978; Green 2009; Haigh 1995; Lake 1987; Lake 1988; Milton 2005; Spurr 1991; Tyacke 1987; Tyacke 2001). That preaching spectrum also needs to be enlarged to include Catholic preachers whose influence among important Catholic families over our period, as Michael Questier highlights, proved "quite out of proportion to their numbers and even to the material resources of their patrons" (Questier 2006, 289).

Moreover, the performative nature of sermons means that their traces survive in a wide variety of forms: complete sermons written by preachers; scribal copies;

preachers' pulpit notes; notes by listeners and readers of sermons in varying degrees of detail; outlines by preachers, listeners, and readers; letters and other documents containing accounts of sermons; and lists of sermons. Because earlier scholars concentrated primarily upon complete sermons, little effort has been made, either by cataloguers or by researchers, to define the characteristics that distinguish the surviving forms from each other. In practice, many of these distinctions are unclear.

GEMMS project: Purpose and scholarly context

Sermon scholars have long been aware of these limitations and their impact on both the quality and quantity of research on manuscript sermons and on notetaking at sermons (Morrissey 2017, 294–303). While many create private lists or databases that reflect their own research programs, few have the time and opportunity to perform a comprehensive or systematic search of the archives. A few American scholars have attempted to provide public access and establish more collaborative approaches to scholarship; however, their successes have been limited.

The earliest of these projects is *Southern Manuscript Sermons before 1800* (Lofaro 2010), essentially a bibliography of manuscript sermons from the five southern colonies/states (Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia) during the colonial period. Begun by Richard Beale Davis in 1946, it was expanded in scope and completed by Michael A. Lofaro (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), who took over the work in 1976. The project's stated goal was to "help scholars to construct a more complete picture of the nature of the Southern mind before 1800 and reveal how it contributes to a national ethos" (Lofaro 2010, xiii), and more specifically to enable comparisons between these sermons and those preached in the northern colonies/states. Although the printed version, published in 2010, promised additions and corrections to the online database, it seems new records are not being added. In appearance, the records for the over 1600 sermons in the database resemble those of a traditional library catalogue, with individual sermons assigned accession numbers, and authors and titles providing the main points of entry. While the individual records are informative, search functionality is limited by the use of controlled vocabulary rather than free text searching, and the evolving

nature of sermon scholarship has rendered some assigned key words obsolete. Equally frustrating is that terms one might expect to find, such as 'Calvin', 'election' or, more broadly, 'theology of grace', are not among the keywords used. Moreover, the database's coverage of repositories and preachers is idiosyncratic, since data collection was undertaken by individual researchers over a period of many years, and only complete sermons were included.

Several scholars have initiated collaborative projects to undertake the more labour-intensive task of presenting transcriptions of manuscript sermons; however, they have struggled to find volunteer transcribers. *Sermon Notebooks Online* (Neuman 2019) is the fairly recent creation of Meredith Marie Neuman at Clark University, author of *Jeremiah's Scribes: Creating Sermon Literature in Puritan New England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). She describes her personal website as "an experiment in sharing the onerous work of transcription by breaking it down into less onerous pieces" (Neuman 2019), and invites volunteers to take on tasks ranging from entire sermons to smaller sections of text. To date, however, few seem to have accepted the challenge, and the site presents a single transcription, alongside useful paleographic resources. Neuman (2019) does not indicate an intention to create a database with search functions as more transcriptions are added, and this development would likely require a more committed group of collaborators and/or massive funding.

Such an approach has been taken by TEAMS (*Transcribing Early American Manuscript*, Hutchins 2019), a group-sourcing initiative under the general editorship of Zach Hutchins at Colorado State University, author of *Inventing Eden: Primitivism, Millennialism, and the Making of New England* (Oxford, 2014). The stated goal of this project is "to transcribe and publish a selection of sermons indicative of the rich diversity of manuscript sermons available in archives" (Hutchins 2019). The project also relies upon volunteer transcribers, and the content is therefore dictated by their interests and research projects. Although the website lists few contributors, the group has succeeded in digitizing transcriptions of fifty sermons. Unlike *Sermons Notebooks Online*, which invites contributions from transcribers with all levels of experience, this group follows standardized transcription protocols clearly indicated on the site. The search functions are relatively primitive, but users

may search by bible book and verse, author, denomination, location, and year, as well as within the full text. Possibly due to an inability to obtain institutional permissions, the site presents the transcriptions without images of the originals, which removes the reader from the manuscript as material object.

In the UK, The National Archives (TNA) provides bibliographic access not only to its own materials, but also to records listed in the catalogues of over 2,500 other archives in the nation; however, the omission of private libraries containing significant manuscript sermon collections, such as Dr. Williams's Library, makes this resource less useful for sermon scholars. To date, however, the active community of early modern sermons scholars in the UK, perhaps deterred by the vast number of manuscripts and collections in the British Isles, has not attempted notable subject-specific databases or transcription projects.

Despite their limitations, such projects bear witness to the desire of sermon scholars to find more efficient means of expanding their research resources. Recognizing the gaps between project intentions and the imperfections of individual efforts enabled us to develop a set of guidelines for our own project. First, we recognized the importance of developing a database that would support robust searching functions and of ensuring stable hosting that would enable ongoing maintenance and updating. We also saw that providing access to a more representative set of sermons (including sermon notes) would only be possible through collaboration involving both a dedicated research team and a committed group of sermon scholars centred on the project as both users and contributors. While witnessing the limited success of group-sourcing transcription affirmed our decision not to include transcriptions in the first iteration of GEMMS, *Southern Manuscript Sermons* demonstrated the pitfalls of assigning keywords likely to become outdated as points of access.

GEMMS project: A brief history of challenges and successes

Funded by a five-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Grant (2014–2019), the first phase of the project is nearing completion and has achieved its two primary goals: collecting a significant quantity of metadata

at libraries and archives in the UK and establishing a stable and fully searchable database containing this metadata. Before beginning this theoretical and practical work, we appointed a board of UK sermon scholars including historians, literary scholars, and a theologian, who have provided advice on various matters, including creating a taxonomy and on the types of queries sermon scholars were likely to bring to the database. This group also collaborated with us regarding initial design decisions, contributed data, assisted with recruitment of UK research assistants, and expanded the international scope of the project.

Our first challenge was to determine the parameters of the project and construct a taxonomy for the very diverse materials involved. We established the date range for both theoretical and practical reasons: 1530 represents the beginnings of English Protestantism, which changed both the importance and style of preaching, while 1715 marks the end of the Stuart dynasty. From a practical perspective, relatively few manuscripts remain from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, while by the early eighteenth century the volume of both printed and manuscript sermons is so great as to be unmanageable, and the increased availability of printed sermons decreases the need to rely on manuscripts to ensure a wide representation of preaching styles and theological positions. The decision to include sermons housed in North America as well as in the UK and Ireland recognizes an opportunity both to link scattered works of particular preachers and to offer possibilities for research that compares and contrasts the sermon cultures on each continent.

Just as the geographical distribution of manuscripts has been challenging for traditional scholarship, it remains challenging for digital scholarship. We began by compiling lists of manuscripts at 90 repositories to establish a working bibliography of over 1,815 manuscripts and manuscript collections. With the majority of these collections housed in the UK and the principal researchers based in Canada, we have tried to make efficient use of our research trips by focusing on repositories with rich collections, such as the Bodleian Library and Dr. Williams's Library, while extending our searches to smaller and less well-known archives as time permits. Research Assistants (RAs) have also collected data at many smaller repositories that have

been easier for them to visit, and Iter Fellows in Toronto have collected data from manuscripts that have been digitized and are available online from repositories, primarily in the US.

While this system is efficient (although not all of the records were accurate), we recognize that data has not been collected systematically, library by library, geographical area by geographical area. Any search, therefore, reflects only the results of the data we have entered, data not statistically relevant because we have not aimed for complete coverage of any single collection (with the exception of the contents of Dr. Plume's Library: see below). Moreover, it initially limited us to those with online finding aids, repositories that most experienced researchers would be familiar with. Old-fashioned human connections led us to Dr. Helen Kemp, a recent graduate of the University of Essex, when she applied for an RA position. We learned of Dr. Kemp's work in cataloguing individual sermons in manuscripts at the private Dr. Plume's Library and were successful in hiring her to add this data to GEMMS. Similarly, a chance encounter at Dr. Williams's Library led Dr. Shami to a collection of uncatalogued manuscripts at Westminster College, Cambridge. It is these connections that have led to adding knowledge of new collections and have contributed greatly to the strength of this resource. We have now collected data from 33 archives and have added data from 858 manuscripts, resulting in over 14,000 records of individual sermons, the majority of which had never been individually catalogued.

Recognizing quickly that entering data directly into the database during these research trips was inefficient, we reverted to taking notes and photographing information that was difficult to decipher. RAs then entered the metadata into the database. While this working arrangement makes it possible to collect and process data efficiently, as well as to help to train RAs in palaeography, there are disadvantages. Not all repositories allow photography, and when incomplete or defective information is found in our notes, often months after it has been collected, we must either rely on our memories or send RAs to verify the correct information, a relatively expensive procedure for a single piece of missing data. Checking for

accuracy occupies a significant amount of research time because we understand that accuracy is crucial to the long-term usefulness and survival of GEMMS.

Developing a taxonomy for the various kinds of sermon traces described above was a primary concern in the first stages of data collection and database design. Because most scholars have made limited use of sermon traces other than complete sermons, there has been little agreement on how to classify or refer to these materials (Morrissey 2017, 294). GEMMS has classified items into Sermon Types (**Figure 1**) according to two criteria: structure and creator.

Short summaries or lists of sermons kept in sermon notebooks, commonplace books, letters, and diaries represent another class of materials. As some manuscripts contain large numbers of such brief traces, we have chosen not to attempt individual entries for each sermon mentioned, but to identify the lists or diaries as 'Sermon Reports' and to summarise their contents.

> **'Auditor's Notes'**: notes taken by an auditor of a sermon.
>
> **'Auditor's Outline'**: a list of the heads or main points of a sermon written by an auditor.
>
> **'Preacher's Notes'**: notes written by a preacher, rather than a fully written out sermon.
>
> **'Preacher's Outline'**: a list of the heads or main points of a sermon written by the preacher.
>
> **'Reader's Notes'**: notes taken by a reader of a sermon.
>
> **'Reader's Outline'**: a list of the heads or main points of a sermon written by a reader.
>
> **'Sermon'**: a sermon written out in full, though it may contain minor corrections or revisions, such as changing the occasional word or phrase. It may have been written either by the preacher or another person.
>
> **'Sermon Draft'**: a fully written out sermon with substantial revisions or corrections, not just changes to the occasional word or phrase. The revisions may have been made at any time, including for a subsequent preaching of a sermon. Sermon drafts will almost always have been written by the preacher, but someone else may have later revised the sermon.
>
> **'Sermon Fragment'**: a part of a sermon, either written by the preacher or someone else.
>
> **'Sermon Notes'**: notes of a sermon when it is not known whether they were written by the preacher or someone else.
>
> **'Sermon Outline'**: an outline of the heads or main points of a sermon when it is not known whether it was written by the preacher or someone else.
>
> **'Transcription of Manuscript Sermon'**: a copy of a sermon known to be transcribed from a manuscript sermon.
>
> **'Transcription of Printed Sermon'**: a copy of a sermon known to be transcribed from a print edition.
>
> **'Transcription of Sermon (Unknown Source)'**: a sermon that has been copied from another source, but it is unclear whether that source sermon was from a manuscript or a printed text.

Figure 1: GEMMS Sermon Taxonomy.

We add an additional means of classification, Sermon Genre, to indicate when a sermon is clearly of a particular kind, such as a funeral sermon, a fast sermon, or a sermon in preparation for communion. While these genres are often indicated fairly clearly in sermon headings, others such as Doctrinal, Instructional, Confutational, and Rehearsal can seldom be recognized without reading the sermons, which has not been possible given the time constraints of data collection. We anticipate that as researchers use the database they will be able to add such details to the entries and to offer corrections when necessary; however, the lack of such information in the shorter term may reduce the usefulness of the database for some potential users (full taxonomy available at Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons 2019a).

This range of materials complicates the processes of data collection and entry. Often, we are dealing with incomplete or illegible information, requiring researchers and assistants – like detectives – to interpret exactly what they have in front of them. Incorrect and/or incomplete cataloguing offers researchers the pleasures of problem-solving, but also uses valuable time, sometimes to no satisfactory end. While a clearly defined taxonomy supports consistency in data entry, our experience also indicates that applying the taxonomy (which cannot account for every permutation of classification) is a compromise between precision and utility and is handled differently by different researchers. Despite training of RAs and detailed guidelines for data entry, the classification of the heterogeneous contents of many manuscripts is not always clear. As the number of contributors grows, the potential for variant interpretations also increases. Allowing users to contribute their own data offers an even greater possibility of eroding the value of the taxonomy.

Moreover, as our research continues, we discover materials that do not fit existing classifications. For example, RA Hannah Yip, in a recent blog post, has raised the question of sermons prepared by laypersons that do not focus on a specific biblical text, a category that many traditional definitions of the sermon exclude (Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons 2019b). We are faced with the question of expanding the classification system and perhaps correcting existing records, or simply using free text fields to note anomalies and ambiguities.

Identifying people associated with the manuscripts poses a second problem. With the assistance of our RAs, we have supplemented the archival data to provide brief biographies for individuals who can be traced with the aid of online resources such as the Clergy of the Church of England database (2019) (CCEd), the Surman Index Online (2019) (for nonconformist preachers), the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the Oxford and Cambridge alumni databases (2019) (with the website providing links to these resources), but the GEMMS people records have presented many challenges. Multiple versions of names need to be collated and cross-referenced, and it is often difficult to distinguish one Mr. Smith from another (requiring separate entries) due to insufficient biographical information. Identifying named individuals with no other claims to fame (particularly subjects of funeral sermons) is frequently impossible. Inconsistencies of geographical locations, which are frequently abbreviated in manuscripts and some of which no longer exist as separate communities, are equally troubling; handwriting is frequently cramped, and notes taken in haste at sermons are at times barely and incompletely legible.

One of the greatest problems we have faced, however, is that many sermons can be dated only very approximately. In order to cope with the problems arising from dates, we have established two different types of dates: composition date and preaching date. A composition date is given if there is no indication of when the sermon was preached. Many manuscripts are dated only provisionally across a broad date range (e.g. seventeenth century), and even when examined yield few clues as to a more precise date range, so we have had to train RAs to use judgment and consistency when entering metadata related to dates. Having no date is not an option. These dates often span a large range of years, and 'ca.' is added when they are approximate. They may be based on the repository's dating of the manuscript or on the preacher's active dates, if known. Dates of actual preachings are given when provided on the manuscript, although these may also be approximate within a short span of months or years. A further complication is that some manuscripts use 'old style' dating, in which the year begins on 25 March, while others use 'new style', with the year beginning 1 January, a system becoming more common by the late

seventeenth century. When a manuscript follows a chronological order, it is generally possible to tell which style is being used; however, in many cases this is impossible, and we note any uncertainties.

These problems of classification, lack of biographical certainty, and vague dating create challenges that make effective searches difficult. The Advanced Search Function (**Figure 2**) allows researchers to search within the classification of Sermons, Manuscripts, or Sermon Reports, and to limit those searches by Repository, Manuscript, Date, Bible Book, Person and Role, Sermon Type, Sermon Genre, Preaching Occasion, and Preaching Location. Free text searching allows access to other relevant information including the identification of print editions or other manuscript witnesses, when they exist, to enable users to compare different versions of the same sermon, an exercise that helps researchers to better understand the transition from manuscript to print and the ways in which sermons might be adapted to different

Figure 2: Advanced Search for Sermons.

audiences. We also record physical characteristics of manuscripts that may be useful to book historians, such as unusual bindings or paper, or the presence of clasps.

Simple searches are impressively swift, but we are still working to ensure that users can drill down through many levels to arrive at very specific – and accurate – findings. Achieving consistent and reliable results from more complex searches remains a challenge. As an alternative to the search functions, users can browse tables including Sermons, Manuscripts, Repositories, People, Places, Bible Books, and Sermon Reports. However, browsing becomes less and less efficient as more records are added to the database.

As in any such project, search results depend upon the quality of the data as well as the functionality of the search structure. While our advanced search function is robust, it frequently encounters problems resulting from incomplete or ambiguous data. These problems lack easy solutions since they are intrinsic to the materials themselves.

Future directions

While creating a useful and viable database has taken, and continues to take, many of our resources, we have only begun to tackle our most complex challenge: creating an international, collaborative community of scholars who use manuscript sermons as evidence for their varied research objectives. This is a more formidable task. Our immediate community consists of board members and known sermon scholars, as well as Research Associate Jennifer Farooq, past and present RAs in the UK (Lucy Walton, Catherine Evans, Hannah Yip), and Canadian RAs and Iter Fellows (Robert Imes, Benjamin Durham, David Robinson, Adam Richter, and Brandon Taylor). These researchers, supervised and trained by us and our Research Associate, have progressed from data entry and interpretation to wider application of our published data (for example, several RAs organized and participated in a conference on early modern sermons at Sheffield on 2 November 2018).

However, moving beyond this community will require a vibrant social media presence that facilitates user feedback on the data we are presenting and delivering and that will build momentum beyond what we can accomplish in our public presentations. We will also need to engage board members more creatively to assist

with hiring research assistants, contributing data, evaluating and reviewing GEMMS, and expanding and enriching our online community networks. While some sermon scholars have helped to publicise this resource in print (Clement 2017, 659; Morrissey 2017, 302) and have indicated that they are using it in their work, we have found it difficult to move beyond this dedicated group. Partly this may be a problem of the breadth of audience for this database. As Daniel Pitti (2008) notes, "the narrower and more specific the intended audience, the easier it will be to identify and define the uses of the data" (479). Aside from those scholars who study sermons exclusively or primarily, there is a large group of others whose interest in them may be specific to a particular situation or project. Drawing in these potential users will require engaging with them to determine their needs. To this end, we plan to turn our focus to developing partnerships with other researchers who are interested in manuscript sermons and sermon notes from this period for a variety of purposes.

We have established a partnership with the New England Beginnings project co-ordinated by Dr. Francis J. Bremer (2019): "a partnership to encourage and promote activities that commemorate the cultures that shaped early New England." Not only will this partnership facilitate collaboration with American scholars, but it also offers possibilities for links with non-scholarly organizations, since it focuses on engaging both academics and "a wide, general public audience" (2019). We envision many avenues of participation with members of its loose federation that includes a variety of organizations and scholars: participation in their Guest Scholars program, an initiative that is committed to making the participants' views on New England available to schools, colleges, and community groups via technologies such as teleconferencing, Skype, etc.; and planning and co-hosting an international conference focused on interactions between England and New England involving sermons as a showcase for GEMMS as a research resource and as a collaborative initiative to bring these two worlds together, historically and culturally, for the education and mutual benefit of North American and European participants. Other future plans include offering workshops at universities that have suitable programs. Attracting casual or occasional users will require thinking beyond academic structures to historical and genealogical societies, perhaps using the New

England Beginnings as a model for this kind of engagement. Of special importance will be working directly with librarians and archivists to develop relationships that progress beyond gaining access to their collections to genuine collaborations that could include digitization projects.

Migration to the Drupal platform during our next phase, set to begin in 2019, will also be challenging. We intend for this migration to enable us to create an enhanced search interface and to develop group-sourcing features. Drupal has been selected for its ability to be customized, as well as for its extensive usage among university libraries, which are the academy's primary dispensers and preservers of digital scholarly content. This new phase will also see increasing promotion of the database among scholars, and, most importantly, the addition of features that will allow users to contribute their own metadata and to add comments, upload images (with permissions), and attach files (including transcriptions) to existing records. However, while early users and prospective contributors have expressed interest in the expansion of the project to include online images and transcriptions, we are unlikely to add these features systematically due first to the sheer volume of materials and secondly to repository policies and copyright restrictions. Additionally, while we hope to enable researchers to plan their time and travel more effectively based on the information the database provides, we see value in consulting these materials in person whenever possible to benefit from seeing the sermons in context and recognizing the manuscripts as material objects.

We were fortunate at the beginning of the project to secure hosting by Iter: Gateway to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (2019), which has given the website a stable platform that ensures its future availability and free access. Iter's mandate is to provide "a flexible environment for communication, exchange, and collaboration" (Bowen, Crompton, and Hiebert 2014, 1) among Renaissance scholars, and it is therefore concerned not simply with hosting resources, but also with the potential use of these resources for scholarship and teaching, with opportunities for publication and "social knowledge creation" (Bowen, Crompton, and Hiebert 2014, 5). However, "Storage is not synonymous with sustainability [:] What sustains a scholarly text [or

database] is the community that is built around it, the way that its ideas are taken up by other scholarship, and the way that it circulates among scholars, students, and the general public" (Bowen, Crompton, and Hiebert 2014, 7). The project is ultimately valuable only if such circulation occurs. We hope that situating our "boutique" resource (Powell, et al. 2015, 7) within Iter, with its connections to ReKN (Renaissance Knowledge Network 2019) and INKE (Implementing New Knowledge Environments 2019) will help to engage scholars in different disciplines and scattered geographical locations in new kinds of research using the data we are collecting about early modern sermons and provide additional publication opportunities.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Author contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, original draft preparation, review and editing of this essay.

Editorial contributions

Section/Layout editor: Mahsa Miri, University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator
Copy editor: Shahina Parvin, University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator.

References

Blench, John Wheatley. 1964. *Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Study of English Sermons, 1450–c.1600.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Bowen, William R., Constance Crompton, and **Matthew Hiebert.** 2014. "Iter Community: Prototyping an Environment for Social Knowledge Creation and Communication." *Scholarly and Research Communication* 5(4): 1–9. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2014v5n4a193

Bremer, Francis J. 2019. "New England Beginnings." Accessed October, 19. https://www.newenglandbeginnings.org.

Cambridge Alumni Database. 2019. "Cambridge Alumni Database." Accessed October, 19. http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/acad/enter.html.

Carlson, Eric. 2003. "'The Boring of the Ear': Shaping the Pastoral Vision of Preaching in England, 1540–1640." In *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, edited by Larissa Taylor, 249–96. Leiden: Brill.

Clement, Jennifer. 2017. "Introduction: Rhetoric, Emotion and the Early Modern English Sermon." *English Studies* 98(7): 655–60. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2017.1339990

Clergy of the Church of England Database. 2019. Accessed October, 19. http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp.

Cogswell, Thomas. 1990. "The Politics of Propaganda: Charles I and the People in the 1620s." *Journal of British Studies* 29(3): 187–215. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/385957

Davies, Godfrey. 1939. "English Political Sermons, 1603–1640." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1: 1–22. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/3816014

Davies, Horton. 1986. *Like Angels from a Cloud: The English Metaphysical Preachers 1588–1645*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library.

Deios, Laurence. 1590. *That the pope is that Antichrist: And an Answer to the Obiections of Sectaries, which Condemne this Church of England.* London: George Bishop and Ralph Newberie.

Donne, John. 1996. *John Donne's 1622 Gunpowder Plot Sermon: A Parallel-Text Edition*, edited by Jeanne Shami. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Eales, Jacqueline. 1996. "Provincial Preaching and Allegiance in the First English Civil War (1640–1646)." In *The Culture of English Puritanism*, 1560–1700, edited by C. Durston and J. Eales, 184–209. New York: St. Martin's Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24437-9_7

Ferrell, Lori Anne, and **Peter McCullough.** 2000. *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History in England, 1600–1750*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons. 2019a. "GEMMS's Sermon Taxonomy." Accessed October 19. http://gemmsproject.blogspot.com/p/gemms-sermon-taxonomy.html.

———. 2019b. "Silent Preaching: Laypeople's Manuscript Sermons, c.1530–c.1700." Accessed October 19. http://gemmsproject.blogspot.com.

Green, Ian M. 1978. *The Re-establishment of the Church of England, 1660–1663*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2009. Continuity and Change in Protestant Preaching in Early Modern England. Friends of Dr. Williams's Library, 60th Lecture. London: Dr. Williams's Trust.

Haigh, Christopher. 1995. "The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation." In *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England*, edited by Margo Todd, 13–32. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hughes, Ann. 1987. *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620–1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511522604

Hunt, Arnold. 2010. *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchins, Zachary ed. 2019. "Transcribing Early American Manuscript Sermons (TEAMS)." Accessed October 19. http://earlyamericansermons.org.

Implementing New Knowledge Environment (INKE). 2019. Accessed October 20. https://inke.ca.

ITER: Gateway to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. 2019. "Iter: Bibliography." Accessed October 19. https://www.itergateway.org.

Lake, Peter. 1987. "Calvinism and the English Church, 1570–1635." *Past and Present* 114: 32–76. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/past/114.1.32

———. 1988. *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker*. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.

Lofaro, Michael gen. ed. 2010. *Southern Manuscript Sermons before 1800: A Bibliography*. Knoxville: Newfound Press. Accessed October 19, 2019. https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=utk_newfound-ebooks. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7290/V77P8W94

McCullough, Peter. 2011. "Preaching and the Context: John Donne's Sermon at the Funerals of Sir William Cokayne." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern*

Sermon, edited by Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan, 213–67. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237531.013.0012

Milton, Anthony. 2005. *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).* Suffolk: Boydell Press.

Mitchell, W. Fraser. 1962. *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of Its Literary Aspects.* New York: Russell and Russell.

Morrissey, Mary. 2011. *Politics and the Paul's Cross Sermons, 1558–1642.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199571765.001.0001

———. 2017. "Sermon-Notes and Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Communities." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 80(2): 293–307. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2017.0017

Neuman, Meredith. 2019. "Sermon Notebooks Online." Accessed April 16. https://wordpress.clarku.edu/meneuman/sermon-notebooks-online/.

Pitti, Daniel V. 2008. "Designing Sustainable Projects and Publications." In *A Companion to Digital Humanities,* edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth. Wiley. Accessed October 19, 2019. http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405103213/9781405103213.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-1&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-5-1&brand=default.

Powell, Daniel, Raymond Siemens, Matthew Hiebert, Lindsey Seatter, and **William R. Bowen.** 2015. "Transformation through Integration: The Renaissance Knowledge Network (ReKN) and a Next Wave of Scholarly Publication." *Scholarly and Research Communication* 6(2): 1–17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2015v6n2a199

Questier, Michael. 2006. *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550–1640.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496004

Renaissance Knowledge Network. 2019. Accessed October 19. https://rekn.org.

Shami, Jeanne. 1992. "Introduction: Reading Donne's Sermons." *John Donne Journal* 12(1–2): 1–23.

———. 2011. "Women and Sermons." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, edited by Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan, 154–77. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2017. "The Sermon." In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, edited by Andrew Hiscock, and Helen Wilcox, 185–206. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199672806.013.11

Spurr, John. 1991. *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689.* New Haven: Yale University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt211qx3d

The Surman Index Online. 2019 "How to Use the Surman Index." Accessed October 20. http://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/.

Tyacke, Nicholas. 1987. *Anti-Calvinism: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 2001. *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530–1700.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Wabuda, Susan. 2002. *Preaching During the English Reformation.* Cambrige: Cambridge University Press.

Walsham, Alexandra. 1994. "'The Fatall Vesper': Providentialism and Anti-Popery in Late Jacobean London." *Past and Present* 144: 36–87. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/past/144.1.36

Wooding, Lucy. 2011. "From Tudor Humanism to Reformation Preaching." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, edited by Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan, 329–47. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237531.013.0016