

16th Century Chronicle to 21st Century Edition: A Review of The Diary of Henry Machyn

A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550–1563, by Henry Machyn: Manuscript, Transcription, and Modernization. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/machyn/> (Last Accessed: 2014-11-24). Reviewed by Misha Broughton (Cologne Center for the eHumanities), [wbrought\[at\]uni-koeln\[dot\]de](mailto:wbrought[at]uni-koeln[dot]de).

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Abstract

This paper reviews *A London Provisioner's Chronicle*, a digital edition of the manuscript chronicle inscribed by London shopkeeper Henry Machyn from 1550 to 1563. Working from high resolution scans of the fire damaged original and consulting later citations by antiquarian John Strype, the editors were able to not only produce an edition which transcribed the existing artifact into a digital medium, but also to reconstruct large sections of the damaged sections to approximate its original state. However, while the edition provides a faithful – if somewhat minimal – reading copy of Machyn's chronicle, the edition falls far short of the potential offered by digital publication.

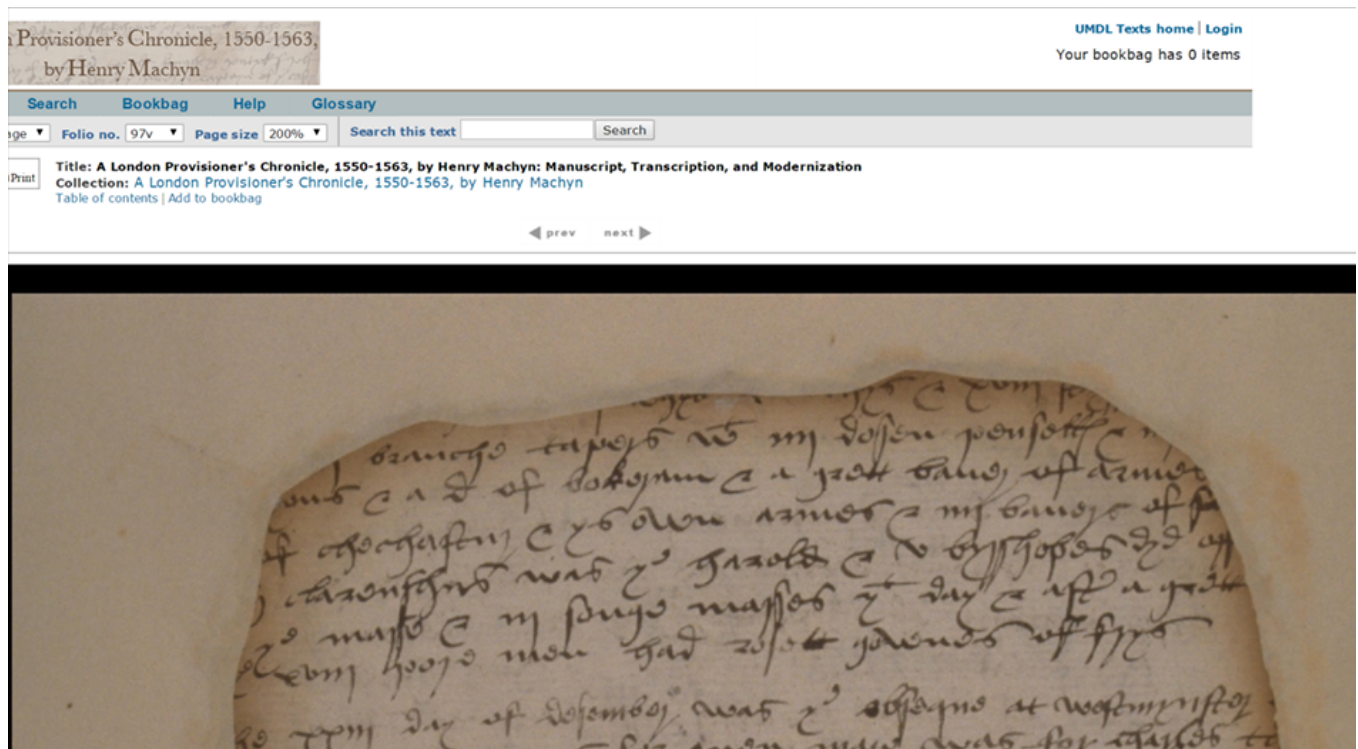
Introduction

On a shelf in the British Library sits a fire-damaged manuscript, its charred leaves mounted to paper frames, marked MS *Cotton Vitellius F.v*. These 162 leaves, damaged by the fire in the Cottonian Library of 1731, are the remains of the chronicle – or diary, depending on the scholar consulted – of Henry Machyn, a 16th century provisioner and tailor in the city of London. Machyn, a dealer in funeral trappings, inscribed in the 1550s and 1560s a far-ranging – if somewhat erratic – record of the events of his day. Whatever spoke of pageantry or gossip – from a royal procession to a local girl's suicide, from public merriment to public executions, from high affairs of state to the scandalous, and more local, sexual affairs of one Dr. Langton – Machyn dutifully noted. Traditionally of interest for its depiction of the lives of the higher estates – Edward VI's death; the rise of Queens Jane Seymour, Mary I, and Elizabeth I; and the infamous rebellion of Thomas Wyatt – the chronicle continues to be of relevance for its depiction of more local events: the suicide of a cuckolded armorer, or the revels of the poor during festival times. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his line of work, funerals particularly caught Machyn's reporting gaze, but even in this he was surprisingly democratic: in his chronicle, the funerals of the great and powerful and those of infamous traitors share the page with that of a “mean gentleman” physician of Cambridge.

Though the work of an amateur chronicler – and a relatively uneducated amateur, at that (Mortimer 982) – the manuscript has held particular interest over the centuries as much for historians, for its depictions of affairs of state, as for linguists, as a source of insight into 16th century pronunciation. However, the chronicle has seen little publication since its collection by Robert Cotton in the early 17th century. While John Strype quotes from it extensively in his 1598 *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, it was not until John Nichols' 1848 *The Diary*

of Henry Machyn that Machyn's work was completely transcribed, printed, and published. However, even 18th century scholars found numerous errors and omissions in Nichols' transcription (Bailey–Miller–Moore.), and subsequent critics have been no more complimentary (Mortimer 981). A new edition has been long needed, and in 2006 Richard Bailey, Marilyn Miller, and Colette Moore addressed this need, publishing the online edition *A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563, by Henry Machyn*. This review will examine the *Chronicle* not only on its merits as a work of scholarly editing but also on the basis of its presence as a digital example of that field of work.

The Edition



Folio with fire damage.

Published through Michigan Publishing, an imprint of the University of Michigan Library, Bailey, Miller, and Moore's *Chronicle* is a modest edition, judged on the scale of 'big humanities' projects: though weighing in at roughly 250,000 words – sizable for any print edition, certainly – the *Chronicle* treats only a single primary source, transcribed from the damaged autograph and reconstructed from only a single later publication. It claims to provide 'a complete inventory of material required by scholars and readers: images of the manuscript, a faithful transcript of those images, and a rendering in modern English' (*Chronicle*), and – judged only by these aims – it succeeds admirably. Working from high-resolution page scans provided by the British Library, the editors not only transcribe the surviving text from the fire-damaged pages but also go beyond their own claims, searching Strype's *Ecclesiastical Memorials* for quotations of the missing and damaged segments in order to reconstruct as much as possible of the document's original content. This reconstructed, or 'enhanced', text is displayed in red throughout the edition to distinguish Strype's 18th century corrections of Machyn's erratic spelling and punctuation from the author's own, unedited language.

Introduction: The World of Henry Machyn

Spectacle! That word captures the enduring fascination of Henry Machyn's *Chronicle*. In defining the word, the *Oxford English Dictionary* declares, "A specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature (esp. one on a large scale), forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it." In the middle of the sixteenth century, London was a place for spectacle, and Machyn presents colorful scenes in fascinating detail.

Machyn's *Chronicle* has long been known as a "diary," a reasonable enough term for John Gough Nichols to have chosen in publishing his edition of it in 1848. But though its entries contain what happened in a single day, there is seldom any use of a story line to develop the rise and fall of an action—as so often makes for a fascinating tale in the diaries of, for example, Samuel Pepys or James Boswell. The rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt against the monarch is presented to us by Machyn in a series of still pictures: Wyatt and his companions "were up" (January 26, 1554); the crafts of London were mustered to meet the rebels, and Wyatt was proclaimed traitor (February 1, 1554). Wyatt's army arrived at Hyde Park corner and marched toward the City of London (where they found the gates barred), and, that night, Wyatt was imprisoned in the Tower (February 7, 1554). The following week, some of his confederates were hanged, drawn, and quartered, and the pieces of their bodies were displayed at every prominent gate of the City (February 14, 1554); Wyatt himself was beheaded not long after, between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, on Tower Hill (April 11, 1554). Here is story indeed.



The Introduction, illustrated with one of Machyn's favorite topics: Death.

Further, the editors take up Ian Mortimer's 2002 criticism in *Tudor Chronicler or Sixteenth-Century Diarist* that John Nichols 'fail[ed] to examine the nature of the document fully and to set it in its proper context' (Mortimer 982) and provide a 6000 word 'Introduction: The World of Henry Machyn' doing just that. Therein, they detail not only the history surrounding Machyn's text and the contexts of the events it represents – illustrating them, where available, with contemporary woodcuts – but also situate Machyn's composition in the greater continua of diary and chronicle writing.

18 1551-03-15 (begins on folio 2v)

The xv day the Lady Mary rode through London unto St. John's, her place, with fifty knights and gentlemen in velvet coats and chains of gold before

her & aft here iiii

on hauyng a peyre of bed{s} of black.

She rode thro chepe syd & through smythfeld y^e v k

The fifteenth day the Lady Mary rode through London unto St. John's, her place, with fifty knights and gentlemen in velvet coats and chains of gold before her, and after her, fourscore gentlemen and ladies, everyone having a pair of beads of black. She rode through Cheapside and through Smithfield—the fifth of King Edward VI.

Reconstruction from Strype or inference?

However, for all the edition's merits as an annotated reading copy, its scholarly apparatus is not without foibles. As Mortimer notes, regarding Nichols's attempt to similarly reconstruct the chronicle from citation, '[Strype's quotations] account for only a few of the gaps [caused by the fire]' (Mortimer 982). The editors of the *Chronicle* acknowledge this deficiency and own that in the face of such an absence '[some] words are completed by inference. Thus, if a part of a word is readable and a part of it is missing, we have completed the word when we have been able to do so with confidence [...]. These are also marked in red text' (Bailey–Miller–Moore). Unfortunately, this single apparatus for separate instances of reconstruction leads to some confusion distinguishing which red-lettered enhancements come from Strype and which are completed by inference. Though the quotations from Strype typically display a mouse-over reference to the location of that quotation in *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, this is not a consistent indicator. For instance, the entry dated 1551-03-15, pictured in fig. 3, begins with a lengthy, complex enhancement which is unlikely to be the work of mere inference. However, there is no mouse-over text to denote the words' origins in *Ecclesiastical Memorials*. Add to this ambiguity the fact that at least one complete page was lost in the fire of 1731 (Mortimer 987) – Bailey, Miller and Moore's *Chronicle* shows no such gap – and it is difficult to know where gaps have been filled, how those gaps have been filled, or even if any gap may exist to be filled at all.

Similarly, an opportunity may have been missed with the editors' choice not to provide an index to the chronicle's far-ranging field of topics. Even though Machyn's own margin-inscribed keywords would be ideal for the task, the editors made the choice – remarked without justification in their explication of the transcription – not to include them (Bailey–Miller–Moore). While any indexing would certainly ease the task of navigating Machyn's rather haphazard organizational strategies, the use of the author's own marginalia to this end would, without doubt, add further value to any edition of the *Chronicle*, potentially giving insight into the author's own understanding of the organization of his work.

All the same, the editors' priorities are explicitly on providing a straightforward reading copy of the work and on distinguishing the original 16th century language from 18th or 21st century reconstructions. While an index or a more nuanced apparatus might preserve the document's transmission history or give deeper insight into the author's intent, neither adds significantly to this primary purpose. Thus, while their inclusion might be considered in future expansions or emendations, the present edition can hardly be considered less than rigorously edited for their lack.

The Digital Divide

However much the edition succeeds in its scholarly aims, as it is a *digital* scholarly edition the question also looms: how ‘digital’ is it, exactly? Even if, as Alan Liu indicates, ‘the ‘content’ of any new medium is old media’ (Liu), we still must accept a dividing line – or perhaps a boundary zone – beyond which a work ceases to be inherently digital and is instead simply a digital echo of a previous media form. While its publication medium cannot be denied, the digital *Chronicle* treads dangerously close to the border that Patrick Sahle distinguishes between a digital edition per se and a *digitized* edition. If a digital edition, as Sahle argues, must be ‘guided by a different paradigm’ and ‘cannot be printed without loss of information and/or functionality’ (Sahle), then the *Chronicle* is almost entirely grounded in the print paradigm: the edition’s transcription and apparatus can be easily accommodated by modern printing technologies, the parallel printing of the modernization with the original text is similarly easily to duplicate, and the scholarly meta-text could be included as front-matter in print, with the provided images of the manuscript pages included as an appendix. In short, though published digitally, the edition bears all the hallmarks of having been informed by a print paradigm.

In fact, even the edition’s online organization and layout seem almost aggressively print-centric. While there is a navigation panel on the start-page, allowing for random access of some the edition’s content, this navigation panel is available only from the start-page, and links to only some of the edition’s content. The bulk of the navigation seems to center on a separate table of contents – a necessity in a print edition, but unnecessarily skeuomorphic in a digital one. Further following this print paradigm, this table of contents presents a series of links to the edition’s content, starting with the sections ‘title page’ and ‘front matter’ and proceeding to the subdivisions of the chronicle itself, divided by year. Navigation within these sections is also notably book-like, reliant on either clicking a ‘Previous Section’ or ‘Next Section’ link to navigate ‘forward’ or ‘backward’ through the content, or on clicking the browser’s ‘Back’ button to return to the table of contents. This form of navigation is hardly distinguishable from accessing the pages of a printed work, but without the convenience of actual pages.

A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563,
by Henry Machyn

UMDL Texts home | Login
Your bookbag has 0 items

Home Search Bookbag Help Glossary

Basic Search

Basic Search Boolean Proximity Bibliographic History

Search in: full text

Find:

Tip: work* finds "worker," "working," etc.
war and peace finds "war and peace"

▼ More tips

Limit to: in author

and

in author

Search

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Search tool.

In effect, the edition utilizes only two affordances native to a digital edition: the use of hypertext links to provide more direct access to the original manuscript page scans and the inclusion of a search function. However, even these token acknowledgements of the affordances of digital media still fall short of their potential. The links to the original page scans open over the current view of the transcription rather than alongside the transcription view or in a new window. Thus, though the original scans are linked to the relevant transcription, there is no easy way to simultaneously view the transcription alongside the original image. Similarly, the search function – which appears to be an out-of-the-box search script incorporated into the edition – does not seem to be optimized for the material it is employed to search, apparently having particular problems with transcriptions of Machyn's abbreviations, barred graphemes, and – of all things – line breaks. In other words, this search function – the engine meant to mechanistically read the text – is illiterate in the encoding strategies it is being employed to read, thereby severely limiting its effectiveness. This illiteracy is slightly alleviated by the inclusion of the parallel modernization, as the search function seems to have little problem searching the modernized text and will return at least a proximate result, but this is useful only in those instances where a reader is searching for an equivalent contemporary spelling; those searching for an archaic spelling or a particular orthographic eccentricity must make do with wildcards and a certain number of false-positive search results.

Nor does the edition's addressing scheme – an integral part of its digitality, if not necessarily a digital affordance – lend itself to easy navigation or, for that matter, citation. The URLs for any given sections of the *Chronicle* are an unintelligible hash of subdirectories, files, and arguments: the URL for the section containing the year 1550, for example, reads 'http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/machyn/5076866.0001.001/1:8.5/--london-provisioners-chronicle-1550-1563?rgn=div2;view=fulltext'. Weighing in at 120 characters, the URL is far too cumbersome for any attempt at citing individual sections. Nor do alterations to this URL lead to particularly expectable results in navigation. Removal of the file designation and/or the arguments – the bits after the last slash, before and after the '?' respectively – from this URL directs the browser to the edition's image frame, displaying the digitization of the first page of the chronicle. While this could be understandable, given that the URL in question is for section 1550, and Folio 1r is the first page dealing with that year, it is less clear why truncating any other annual section would lead to the same image. Meanwhile, the problem is only exacerbated by the fact that accessing the same 1550 section from the navigation bar on the start-page – as opposed to from the table of contents, which generated the example URL – yields a completely different and longer URL, and one even less susceptible to manual modification.

It is possible, of course, that the navigational issues, as well as the incomprehensible resource identifiers, stem from issues of the publishing platform rather than the editing practice. The central problem with the URLs, after all, seems to be that they are more instructions to the publishing platform than an actual identifier of the textual resources. But it is exactly that 'possible' that highlights this edition's central weakness: its critical and technical opacity. The edition offers no access to its original document-descriptive data encoding, no API for interfacing the text with other corpora or critical engines, and no explanation for or explication of these lacks. To the contrary, the edition seems to carefully obfuscate any hint of a connection between its presentation and any underlying markup, while reserving all rights of use under copyright, explicitly forbidding any form of reproduction or reuse without permission of the University of Michigan Press. Without access to that same 'behind the scenes' view which the edition seems so anxious to disallow, however, any insights into the editorial encoding practices or data modeling which inform this edition must be either gleaned from the short 'About the Transcription' page, or be utterly speculative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *A London Provisioner's Chronicle* sets out to make available a reliable, reconstructed reading copy of the manuscript of Henry Machyn, and it succeeds in that goal, but only in so far as it embraces a narrow understanding of the term 'reading', one rooted in the assumptions of previous media forms. However, reading is and always has been a technologically mediated activity, and as our technology grows more sophisticated, affording more and more varied ways of interacting with information, so must our understanding of reading expand with it. Reading, especially scholarly reading, in a digital medium reaches beyond the limits of the page – even beyond the intention of the author or editor – and invites a certain unruliness, a desire to interact with the text in ways besides the strict linearity afforded by the codex.

A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563, by Henry Machyn

UNDL Texts home | Login
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Home Search Bookbag Help Glossary

Add to bookbag Search this text: Go Other search options

Title:	A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563, by Henry Machyn; Manuscript, Transcription, and Modernization
Publication info:	Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2008
Availability:	This work is protected by copyright and may be linked to without seeking permission. Permission must be received for subsequent distribution in print or electronically. Please contact mpub-help@umich.edu for more information.
Subject terms:	Great Britain -- history -- Elizabeth, 1558-1603 -- Sources. London (England) -- history -- 16th century. Great Britain -- history -- Mary I, 1553-1558 -- Sources. Machyn, Henry -- Diaries
URL:	http://hdl.handle.net/2027/ago.5076866.0001.001

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The only link to the Introduction.

The 'digital paradigm' that Sahle mentions as necessary to a true digital edition is one that accepts this unruliness and works through the media to facilitate such a reading. While this does not foreclose the possibility of the re-use of past media affordances in digital work, such as this edition does with its table of contents, when those affordances eclipse the expectations of the new media, they do so to the detriment of the reading. A first perusal of this edition might leave a reader finding it all but entirely lacking in historical annotation, containing only a paragraph on the start-page explaining the manuscript's historical significance. To the contrary, though, the edition contains both an informative historical contextualization in its 'Introduction' and a detailed timeline of 'London in Machyn's Time', but these two resources are buried in the table of contents, sandwiched between the 'List of Illustrations' and the 'Acknowledgements.' While it would be obvious to seek them there in a book, or simply leafed to the beginning of the book, in a digital edition, such important and introductory metatext should be prominently linked from the start-page.

But as far as I can deduce, the majority of the edition's shortcomings as a digital text can be attributed not so much to the editors' theory of their source text, but rather to a lack of theorizing regarding the resulting edition. Whatever the strengths of the UMDLTexts hosting system – and I imagine that 'simplicity of integration' and 'broad applicability' rank high among them – it seems singularly inappropriate to the display of this particular edition. Beyond even the verbose URLs and insufficient search mentioned above are a host of other hosting–edition mismatches that make for a confusing experience browsing the edition. There is a 'Bookbag' feature, prominently displayed in the toolbar of most pages, which is nowhere documented within the edition. A single 'Add to Bookbag' button can be accessed from the table of contents, but clicking it returns no confirmation or explanation of what the action accomplishes. While it appears to be some form of citation generator, probably tied into a library- or university-wide document management system, the lack of further access to that system for outside users makes its prominent inclusion of limited overall value. Similarly, the way UMDLTexts shifts the view between its display of the transcribed text and the original images leads to some counter-intuitive interface choices as well, in particular, the inclusion of a special 'search' toolbar in the single-page image display. The inclusion of this option *only* for single image pages, especially as the toolbar already contains a full-text search feature, would seem to indicate that it represented a feature of searching only the displayed image, possibly with a coordinate system to display the original orthography of the search term. Instead, search terms entered into this bar call the same full-text search, with all of the foibles previously mentioned, and with no reference at all to the displayed image from which the search was called. In summary, the UMDLTexts system, with its representation of 'front matter' and its eye towards bibliographic linking, seems optimized for the presentation of digital proxies of existing print works, *digitized* editions, and its use as the medium of choice for a born-and-raised *digital* edition of a manuscript, two media that share few of the affordances of print, seems to result in many of the shortcomings this edition exhibits.

Of course, another affordance of digital media is its extreme mutability, and perhaps it is better to say not that the *Chronicle* is lacking in its digital affordances but rather that it is *currently* lacking in them. It is possible that the UMDLTexts system – geared as a 'one-size-fits-most' solution for the UM Library system – is too broad and established a system to be tailored sufficiently to fully take advantage of the affordances that could make this edition great. However, if it is not so configurable, then the editors would do well to consider migrating to a hosting solution that can do so, especially one that would allow greater access to their core markup, both to human and to machine readers. Because until such time as those changes are made, we can call this only a worthwhile scholarly edition and not actually a *digital* one.*

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Figures

Folio with fire damage.

The Introduction, illustrated with one of Machyn's favorite topics: Death.

Reconstruction from Strype or inference?

Search tool.

The only link to the Introduction.

Notes

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