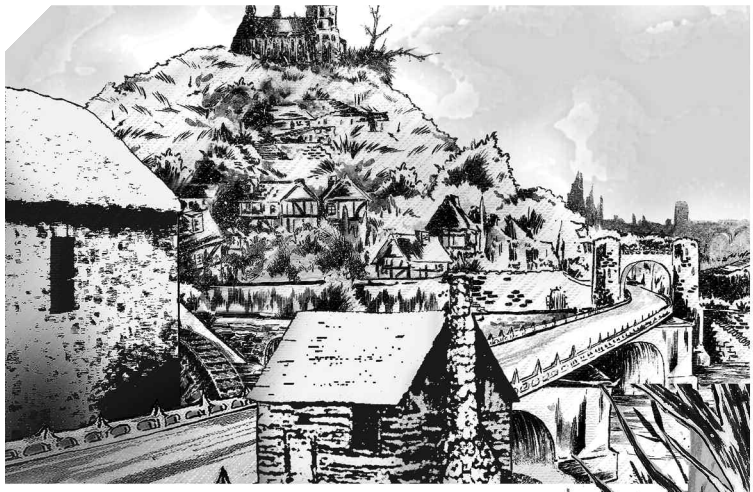
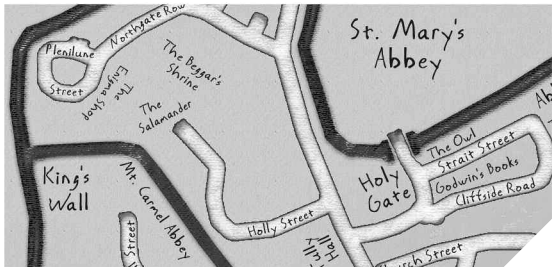
GURPS® Fourth Edition

Locations: Worminghall™









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Gaudeamus igitur
juvenes dum sumus.
[Therefore let us be joyful
while we are young.]
– Gaudeamus igitur
(traditional)

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Introduction

Adam followed the serving maid through the Salamander. He struggled not to be intimidated by his surroundings; he seldom had enough coin for taverns, after paying for parchment and a little food, and his clothes were visibly shabby next to those of the young mages he walked past. He reminded himself that poverty was holy, and no cause for shame.

The older man waiting in the private room wasn't shabby, but neither had he dressed to prove his worldly standing. He looked like a quiet scholar, but something more than a scholar's dispassion was in those eyes.

The older man thanked the young woman, and shut the door as she left.

"Be seated," he said, gesturing at the bench that ran around the walls of the room. "They call me Master Alanus. I see you've heard the name," he added, in a wry tone. "Will you have wine?"

Adam thanked him, and took a cup, from which he sipped cautiously.

"You're Adam, nicknamed the Gargoyle by some of the Goliards. It's said that you got the name because you're silent as a stone image. Before I may say more, I must ask for that silence." Master Alanus held out a crucifix and made a slight gesture with the other hand. "As a servant of King Edward, I bid you to hold what we say here secret, as the King's business. You may tell it to your confessor, if you think there is any sin in it, but to none else. Will you swear, in God's name?"



Adam gave the oath he was asked for. Then Master Alanus spoke of Adam's life, like a lawyer presenting a case: his childhood in Sussex, the discovery of his talent, his journey to Worminghall to study, his begging in the streets to support himself while he learned.

"At Merlin Hall," Master Alanus said, "we train young men for the King's service. Most come from noble houses, as I did. But the house has discretion to admit any young man fit for service, whether high or low born. I have had you watched, as all students here are watched, and I believe you may be fit. I have secured the consent of Master Carolus to take you as a student, if you will. Will you essay it?

"Consider well before you speak. I do not offer you fame or honors. You will not want, within reason, and you will be taught as much as you can learn, not only to cast spells, but to fight and more secret arts. Your reward will be to serve, and sometimes to do evil, so that England may be saved from greater evil, and perhaps to suffer and die in that cause. And to prepare you, you will work harder than you have ever worked yet.

"Think well, and then speak: Yea or nay?"

Adam drank more of the wine while he gathered his thoughts – and wrestled with his doubts. At last, he found voice.

"In God's name, Master, I will undertake it, if you deem me fit for the work."

Schools for mages are a common theme in fantasy. Worminghall is such a school: a medieval university with a large faculty of magic, located in western England, near Wales. It's ready to use as a setting for a fantasy campaign.

Students at medieval universities were very young men – 14 was a common age to start attending. They were often far from their parents, and not closely supervised by their teachers, giving them a lot of freedom to get into trouble.

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Worminghall itself offers a variety of perils, both physical and magical, to test the skills and daring of mages in training. It's also a complex society, where students can seek mentors and friends and take sides in ongoing conflicts. It brings together young men from every background, from great wealth and desperate poverty – including hundreds of foreigners whose only common language is (often halting) Latin. Finally, it's a place where students can gain knowledge of magic itself, and test their newly learned spells.

As their learning advances, they can have adventures outside the city. The Welsh Marches are a wild, often lawless place. The last independent prince of Wales is dead, but rebellious nobles – not all Welsh! – and robber bands stage raids. Furthermore, not all mages learn their skills at the university; wizards and witches trained in older traditions roam the land.

Campaign Uses

Worminghall can fit into an invented fantasy world as easily as into the real Middle Ages. For example, in a campaign based in Yrth (see ***GURPS Banestorm***), a good place for it would be the River Smoke, by the Caithness border of Megalos – conveniently on the normal-mana side, but with a comparatively wild country not far away.

It could be on Earth, but in a later era: in the Restoration, with a young Isaac Newton revolutionizing the Faculty of Alchemy; in the age of steam, as magic confronts science and women seek access to education; or even in the present day, as a setting for urban fantasy.

For the GM using the Infinite Worlds structure, Worminghall might be on "Bacon-1" – named for Roger Bacon, one of the university's founders. This appears to be a close parallel with minor geographic divergences. Infinity analysts find it a puzzle that the timeline remains so close to Homeline history, despite the presence of high-powered magic and alchemy. However, that may explain how Bacon, an alchemist, comes to be alive in 1300, rather than having died in 1294, as he did in Homeline. The founding of the university in 1256, which Bacon supported, was the first clear historical divergence, though it was followed after less than a year by Alfonso X ("the Wise") endowing a Faculty of Magic at Salamanca.

Inspirational Sources

GURPS Locations: Worminghall is an original setting; none of its content comes from previously published books. Some of its ideas were inspired by ***GURPS Fantasy, GURPS Magic, GURPS Thaumatology,*** and ***GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics. GURPS Magic: Spell Charts*** was indispensable in writing it and is highly recommend for planning students' courses of study. The city description format comes from ***GURPS City Stats;*** the treatment of military forces comes from ***GURPS Mass Combat.***

There are more things in
heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your
philosophy.

– William Shakespeare, ***Hamlet***

About the Author

William H. Stoddard is the author of ***GURPS Fantasy, GURPS City Stats,*** and ***GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics.*** He also has written or contributed to many other ***GURPS*** books. ***GURPS Locations: Worminghall*** is his first setting book. He lives in San Diego, California, with his girlfriend, two cats, two computers, and more books than most medieval scholars ever dreamed of.

About *GURPS*

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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

The nonuniversity economy is based primarily on the wool trade; Shropshire wool is of exceptional quality and in high demand. River barges ship wool and other goods. A market for sheep, poultry, and other local livestock is held every Wednesday.

The university itself is an important source of revenues. Without the students, some of Worminghall's taverns would go out of business, and many would become smaller and poorer. Lodgings for students aren't especially profitable to run, between legal limits on rent and property damage. Nonetheless, townspeople's competition for the remaining housing first drove up rents, and then encouraged extensive construction inside the New Wall (p. 14), enriching many property owners. Student and faculty custom supports a variety of specialized businesses (*The Enigma Shop,* p. 20; *Godwin's Books,* pp. 20-21; *Gib the Tailor,* p. 25). Many townspeople have picked up a bit of Latin from dealing with students.

Students who don't complete their education often turn to educating younger boys (*Curriculum,* pp. 7-9). Townsfolk can easily find teachers for their sons, if they think instruction would be profitable, from charity schools taught by friars (*Poor Friars of Worminghall,* p. 16) to private tutors living in their own houses. An unusual number of Worminghall families have sons who go into literate professions or become clergymen.

Folk Magic

The laity in Worminghall include people who use various forms of magic, without having studied them formally. Nearly all the women who use magic are in this position. This *folk magic* encompasses several different approaches, though practitioners mostly aren't interested in scholastic classification – they will learn anything that works. (For the Church's views of these sorts of magic, see *Magic Licit and Illicit,* p. 32.)

Natural magic is based on inherent supernatural qualities of certain substances. Herb Lore skill brings out these innate powers. Several families have old plant-based recipes passed on from mother to daughter (or a favored daughter-in-law or niece). The same skill can be used with substances of animal origin, such as honey or bezoars ("stones" formed from compacted hair in the stomachs of goats, able to be made into antidotes giving +3 HT versus poisons).

Folk practitioners know a few spells of the type included in *image magic* (pp. 38-39). In general, these are limited to spells that don't have other spells as prerequisites. Folk spellcasters don't learn Symbol Drawing and can't benefit from its bonuses.

A third approach is *ritual magic,* which calls up demons, angels, or spirits to serve the mage. Folk practitioners who pursue this keep it quiet, as the Church classifies it as necromancy and forbids it even to scholarly wizards. The Church insists all spirits are demons seeking to corrupt mortal souls; other traditions say mortals can make friends with the Fair Folk or other spirits of the land. Some practitioners have secret books of Necromantic spells; others have advantages such as Medium or Channeling. Either type may acquire spirit Contacts who can cast specific spells for them, often spells the practitioners themselves don't know.

Civil Disorder

The worst thing about living in Worminghall is the students. Their legal immunity means they can generally do as they please, up to the point where city officials can talk the abbot into expelling them. Every decade or two, a student does something bad enough to stir up riots. Most students are decent, but even a decent young man can run wild. "Goliards" (secular students) are viewed stereotypically as rich, privileged, and hedonistic – sometimes perfectly true, though many secular students are as serious as monastic ones.



Not that the city is perfectly law-abiding! Everyday life is violent, with a lot of brawls and an occasional knifing. Going about the streets armed with more than a knife or a staff will attract questions from the authorities. Even so, workingmen and servants may use these basic weapons if a fight starts. Young men from respectable families are more likely to meet outside the city for a duel. Several of these have taken place behind the Sting (pp. 24-25).

The southern part of the riverbank is a rough part of town. Bargemen come on shore to visit taverns. They may brawl with each other, but their sense of honor requires them to gang up on townsfolk or students (*Rivermen,* p. 27).

Two watchmen guard each outer gate at night, under the supervision of the city constable. They can call on the citizenry to pursue lawbreakers – a custom known as "hue and cry."

Magic Licit and Illicit

Under canon law, the Church regulates or prohibits certain forms of magic on theological grounds (see also *Folk Magic,* p. 13).

- Calling on spirits risks falling into worship of false gods. This applies to necromancy in general; to elemental spirit spells; to spells for visiting other planes; and to Divination by crystal balls or reflecting surfaces (*crystallomancy;* using mirrors or pools is also called *catoptromancy*), examining a sacrificed animal's entrails (*extispicy*), or consulting a medium (*gastromancy*). The advantages Channeling and Medium raise the same issues. LC0.
- Divination of future events denies free will and trespasses on divine foreknowledge; this applies to Death Vision and Summon Shade. It would also apply to Timeport and spells for which it's a prerequisite, if those had been discovered (see *Uninvented Spells,* p. 39). LC0.
- *Pretended* divination, using Fortune-Telling, is criminal fraud; the fake diviner will be handed over to the secular authorities. LC0.
- Divination of present or past events is questionable, as it reveals what God has concealed, but is not always prohibited. This applies to spells that reveal past events, remote present events, present events hidden behind walls or under the earth – and present thoughts hidden in another's mind. LC1.
- Divination by interpretation of dreams (*oneiromancy*) is subject to fewer restrictions, because God can choose to reveal hidden truths through dreams. LC2 if the spell Divination is used; LC3 if the dream is interpreted without magic.
- Other forms of spellcasting are permitted to mages trained within the Church. LC2.
- Making use of natural magical qualities is lawful for anyone, subject to Church inspection. This includes Herb Lore and Alchemy. LC3.
- Praying for God's help is always allowed. LC4.

This is partly simple unawareness that other people's magical gifts are less acute than his, but also reflects his belief that solving puzzles for oneself is the best way to learn. He and Marcus Florentinus (p. 20) enjoy meeting for occasional discussions, and respect each other's magical insights, though they present their ideas in different styles – Marcus favors the pyrotechnics of elaborate figures of speech, where Mauritius offers brief glints of illumination amid obscurity.

Father Mauritius took his vows late in life. His wife, Barbara, died not long after giving birth to his daughter. Two years later, he became a monk, giving his children into the care of his wife's brother, and making provisions for their support. His superiors didn't encourage, but tolerated his intermittent contact with them, and his being consulted in emergencies. His son, Antoninus, is a student at Cambridge, interested primarily in astronomy. He inherited his father's Magery, but isn't eager to pursue magic. His daughter, Miranda, at 16, has both talent and interest, particularly in Symbol Drawing, and has read some of his books, but has few options for serious training. She might be able to fit in at Shrewsbury Hall, if she thought of approaching so aristocratic a community.

Father Mauritius can provide Thaumatology-18 as a Contact, and is Completely Reliable. He has Reputation +3 for his magical knowledge (Magical scholars; All the time) and +1 for his abilities as a spellcaster (Worminghall residents; 10 or less), but -1 for having worldly concerns – mainly his children (Worminghall residents; 7 or less). His Religious Rank 3 as a priest contributes to his Status 2 (enhanced by his being a syndic); as a monk, he lives modestly, supported by the abbey, at a level equivalent to Status 0.

Olaus Vermensis

Born Olaf Nilsson in Jutland, Master Olaus Vermensis is now one of Worminghall's most brilliant wizards. Just turned 30, he's a respected teacher in the Element of Water. His mastery of Healing spells has brought him calls to several noble houses.

Olaus leads a double life. Rumors tell of an ultimate healing spell, Resurrection, which can only be cast by a mage familiar with spirit magic. The quest has drawn Olaus to the study of unlicensed books, as one of a small group of necromancers (p. 33). He's also active in the Arcanists (p. 33).

Master Olaus has Status 1; Reputation +1 as a healer and learned man (Worminghall residents; 10 or less); and Reputation +2 as a brilliant theorist of magic (Magical scholars; All the time). As a Contact, Master Olaus provides the skill of Thaumatology-18 and is Somewhat Reliable. He is not likely to become a Patron. His study of necromancy is a -10-point Secret: He might be blackmailed by the threat of exposure, or driven to commit greater crimes to avoid it. His being an Arcanist is only a -5-point Secret.

Roger Bacon

Roger Bacon is the syndic of Worminghall's Faculty of Alchemy, which he himself founded in 1256, after quarreling with Henry of Lexington, who replaced Bacon's close friend Robert Grossetete as Bishop of Lincoln (a diocese that then included Oxford). Now in his mid-80s, he retains much of his vigor. Worminghall rumor suggests that he has discovered alchemical methods of prolonging life.

Originally trained in the Faculty of Arts, Bacon has come to hold high-flown philosophies in contempt. He believes in observing nature. He has spent many years compiling a list of alchemical formulations and testing whether they really work. In this pursuit, he has learned Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic, and he often condemns scholars who talk about books they can't read in the original language. He's also an advocate of prohibiting and burning books, including grimoires, that are shown to be forgeries of ancient texts. His talent for sarcasm makes him feared, but not liked, though many Worminghall scholars are perversely proud of his tirades.

Bacon has little concern for wealth and is Status 0, but has Reputation +4 as a philosopher and alchemist (Scholars; All the time), which somewhat offsets his Odious Personal Habit of ferocious debate (-2 to reactions). As a Contact, Bacon provides Alchemy-21 and is Usually Reliable. He may become a Patron for a gifted scholar, granting few material resources but a wide range of alchemical support – as he has for Dolores de Montoya (p. 19).

Chapter Five
Adventures and Campaigns

Worminghall can play varied roles in a campaign, from the briefly sketched scene of a single encounter, to a complete environment to be explored at length.

Just Visiting

Adventurers might visit or pass through Worminghall for a variety of reasons.

- It's on their way from someplace to someplace else. They could be taking the road west from England to Wales, or boating up or down the Severn. Reasons for travel could be war, trade, a pilgrimage, or escorting a bride to her wedding.
- They could be friends or family of a student.
- They could need information on some arcane topic, magical or otherwise.
- They could need actual magical services: an enchantment, the brewing of a potion, or the breaking of a curse. Worminghall has one of the highest concentrations of mages in Europe, and some of the most skilled.
- They could have magical valuables to sell, perhaps acquired in an adventure: grimoires, enchanted objects, or body parts of rare and dangerous beasts.
- They could be sent to investigate some crime or other problem, either by the king or by the Church. Getting the local factions to play along would be one of the big challenges of such an inquiry.

A related option is to have adventurers *come from* Worminghall, but not stay there. The first session or two could show their last days in town before their actual adventures begin.

Campaigns

An ongoing campaign set in Worminghall will likely be about students of magic. A major choice for such a campaign is how much emphasis to give to studying and learning. On one hand, classroom activities can be kept in the background, like a regular nonadventuring job that pays the bills. The GM could even have players make monthly "study rolls" (p. 36) and keep track of learning accordingly. On the other hand, classroom scenes can be dramatic: clashes with teachers, rivalries with other students, debates over magical lore, first attempts to cast spells (*Magical Instruction,* p. 8), even martial-arts-like "training montages."

Life outside the classroom can easily become exciting. A student who gets involved in heresy or prohibited magic will be called before the university authorities, but few other restrictions exist. Students can have rivalries, and test newly learned spells in magical contests. They can acquire friends and enemies, and get drawn into factions. They can spend their nights at taverns, or get into fights with townsfolk. If they get into trouble – or if trouble comes looking for them – they'll be mostly on their own.

Genres and Themes

GURPS Fantasy (pp. 6-7) discusses the various genres of fantasy. Worminghall can be adapted to different styles, to suit the GM's preferences.

Sword and Sorcery: With most protagonists being mages, this works best as dungeon fantasy. Discovering and exploring the legendary dragon's lair (*A Deeper Mystery,* p. 28) can be the focus in this kind of campaign. This theme is most appropriate for older students who've learned spells suited to combat.

High Fantasy: To gain the proper sense of myth, tie the ongoing struggle between England and Wales to supernatural forces, with angels or pagan spirits supporting the cause of one or the other land. Students at Merlin Hall (p. 19) could be drawn into this – but so could young, naïve students, if they have a suitable Destiny. The actual Merlin (or Morgana) might be somewhere in the background.

Low Fantasy: Classwork, university politics, and daily life in a medieval city are a natural starting point for stories of real life in a fantastic setting. Follow a group of students through apprenticeships in sorcery, and encounters with university and city politics.

Light Fantasy: Young people's misadventures are a classic theme for comedy! Miscast spells give them an entire new set of ways to get into trouble. This kind of campaign is perfect for a band of Goliards who don't take their studies too seriously.

Dark Fantasy: Necromancy is a readymade theme for exploring the borders between fantasy and horror. To make it more personal, have a necromancer's students realize that their master has been bargaining with evil spirits, and that some of what he's taught them has been forbidden arts. Can they extricate themselves from entanglement with dark powers?

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