Hello and welcome back to episode 22 of the counties of England podcast! In this week’s episode, we will be covering the county where Frank Oz was born. The county which holds a copy of the Magna Carta and the county which holds the Mappa Mundi. This week, we will be covering the county of Herefordshire.

Herefordshire is a county located in the West Midlands. It is bordered by 3 counties: Shropshire to the North, Worcestershire to the East and Gloucestershire to the South. It has a population of 192,107, which puts it as the 4th largest county when ranked in terms of population, so quite clearly, it is quite a small county. In terms of area, it is the 23rd smallest county, so in terms of population density, Herefordshire houses just 229 people per square mile putting it as the 3rd smallest county in terms of population density. The county town is Hereford, and the largest town is also Hereford.

The median salary in Herefordshire is £27,100 which puts it below the UK average of £31,500. The unemployment rate is 3.3% which puts it below the UK average of 4.8% and the average house price according to Zoopla estimates is £259,208 which puts it below the UK average of around £330,000.

In parliament, Herefordshire is split into only 2 parliamentary constituencies, which is representative of the counties small population. Both of these constituencies are represented by Conservative MP’s.

The Malverns are often seen as the border between Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The two counties were actually merged until they were split in 1998. I actually live in Worcestershire, and I can testify that the Malverns are a sensible boundary between Herefordshire and Worcestershire purely because of their size, however that will be for the Worcestershire episode, which will be the last county that we cover.

I have been to Herefordshire twice in the past. Once in May 2019, when I stayed at a Travelodge in Hereford in order to see the Hay Festival in Hay-on-Wye. And again in July 2020, I can’t say that from these two visits that I know a lot about Hereford, but I am just mentioning that this is one of the counties that I have actually visited unlike others.

From doing some research online, I have found that Hereford seems to be quite a historical town, with old-fashioned buildings and winding streets. Taking a look at the county on the whole, 85% of the poshest properties in the county are owned by Londoners, suggesting that Herefordshire is becoming a popular destination for Londoners to live due to the inflated house prices in London as mentioned in the Greater London episode.

The Mappa Mundi is an outstanding treasure of the medieval world recording how thirteenth-century scholars interpreted the world in spiritual as well as geographical terms. It bears the name of its author 'Richard of Haldingham or Lafford' (Holdingham and Sleaford in Lincolnshire) and was created around 1300. Drawn on a single sheet of vellum (calf skin) measuring 1.58 x 1.33 meters, it tapers towards the top with a rounded apex. The geographical material of the map is contained within a circle measuring 52" in diameter and reflects the thinking of the medieval church with Jerusalem at the centre of the world. Superimposed onto the continents are around 500 drawings of the history of humankind and the marvels of the natural world, including some 420 cities and towns, 15 Biblical events, 33 plants, animals, birds and strange creatures, 32 images of the peoples of the world and 8 pictures from classical mythology.

This clip from Jay Foreman, if you remember the Greater London episode, you will remember him, will explain a bit more about the Mappa Mundi. This clip also includes Mark Cooper-Jones who regularly features on Jay Foreman’s channel in the “Map Men” series. This is one of three series which Jay Foreman produces with the other two being Politics Unboringed and Unfinished London which is where I got the clip for the Greater London episode. [Play Mappa Mundi clip]

The Magna Carta is also in Hereford. The Magna Carta is a document which was signed back in 1215 by King John, who was King at the time. If you were taught History at school, you will probably know that King John was not a very good king. He had the nickname Lackland meaning lack of land. This is because he lost large amounts of land that England previously had in France to King Philip II of France. This clip will explain more about King John’s time as monarch and why is widely considered to be one of the worst Monarchs in British history. [Play King John clip]

This clip will explain the main points of the Magna Carta. [Play first Magna Carta clip]. And this clip will explain more about the Magna Carta’s significance today. [Play second Magna Carta clip]. The version of the Magna Carta in Hereford Cathedral is the 1217 revised version, and it has been on display since July 2012.

The flag of Herefordshire was registered with the flag institute on the 2nd of November 2019. It features a river running through a red background with a lion passant guardant (sometimes called a "leopard") above and the head of a bull below. The red background is supposed to represent the distinctive rich, dark red soil which is distinctive of Herefordshire. The bulls head symbolises the Hereford Breed bull. The river represents the River Wye which flows through the county.

Fun facts about Herefordshire include: Frank Oz was born in the county in 1944.

Herefordshire is home to the River Wye, which is the fifth-longest river in the whole of the UK. It actually connects Wales and England, travelling back down into Powys. It’s around 135 miles long!

Herefordshire is thought to have a large traveller population, classed as an ethnic group in the region split into New Age, Romany, and Irish travellers.

At least 95% of the county’s land is technically rural. Further data shows that more than 50% of the people living in the county do so in rural stretches.

Herefordshire is not exactly known for its sporting prowess, though its main football team – Hereford United set a pretty impressive league record in 1992. A new record for the most players ever sent off from one side in a league match. They finished the game with just seven players left, but still managed to take Northampton Town to a 1-1 draw!

There’s a very odd law in Herefordshire that, supposedly, still stands to this day. The urban legend states that it’s within law that you can shoot a longbow at a Welshman in Hereford providing you can see the city Cathedral.

Hereford Cathedral is a magnificent building with some pretty magnificent bells! One of the bells in the tower dates all the way back to the 1200s. These bells are pretty high up – 140 feet to be precise

That just about wraps it up for this week’s episode, and as ever I really hope that youn enjoyed it. Make sure to check out the blog post to go with this episode, and stay tuned for the next episode, which will be on Hertfordshire so stay tuned for that one on the 5th of June. Have a good week in the meantime, and I will talk to you again next Saturday.