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Mapping the Uncharted Territory of Folk Drama

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Mumming and guising plays are short verse folk dramas performed by ordinary people around pubs and houses at Christmas and certain other seasons throughout much of England, Scotland, parts of Ireland, and outposts in the Americas.

Script Extract

King George.

In come I King George the man of courage bold
with my broad axe and sword, I won ten crowns of gold
I fought the fiery dragon and I drove him to the slaughter
and by those means I won the King of Egypt's daughter.

Headman.

Come in Turkey Knight.

Turkey Knight.

In comes I Turkey Knight,
come from Turkey land to fight,
I'll battle against you King George the man of courage bold
if thy blood be hot I'll quickly make it cold.

King George.

Woe, woe, my little fellow, thou talkest very bold
just like those young Turkey Knights I have been told
Mince Pies hot, mince pies cold,
send them up to London nine days old,
a battle a battle betwixt you and I
to see to see which on the ground first you or I.

(King George and Turkey Knight do battle. King George gets wounded. Headman helps him, telling him to rise and fight again, when he outs the Turkey Knight.)

Headman.

Oh Doctor, doctor where be'st thee,
that Turkey Knight is wounded through the knee,
through the knee, and through the heart,
the Turkey Knight is wounded in every part.

{Come in Doctor .}

Doctor.

In comes I the jolly noble Doctor
who travelled far and near.

Headman.

Where didst thee travel then, Doctor?

Doctor.

Italy I, Pitaly, France and Spain
now I'm back to old England again.

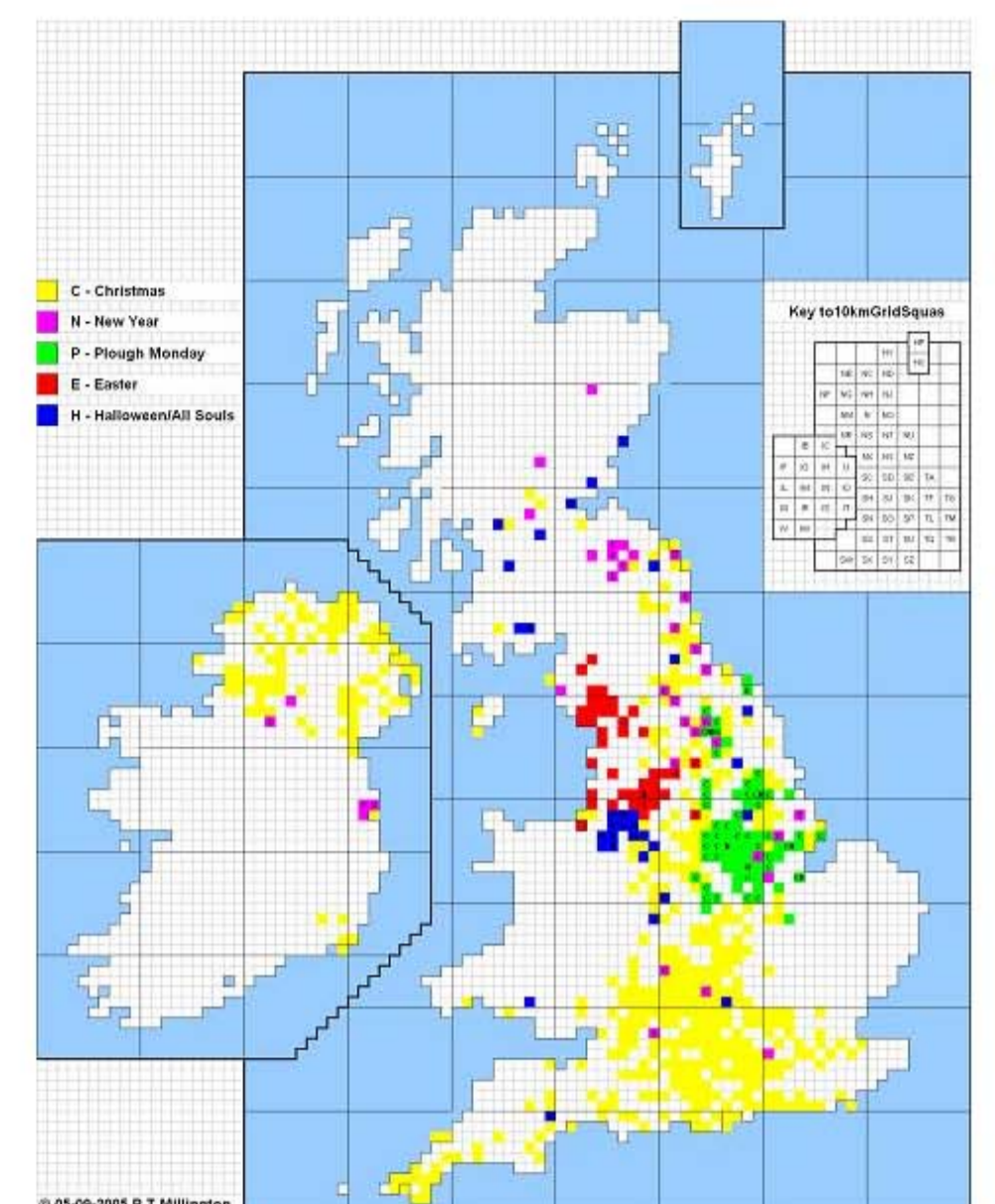
Cuddesdon, Oxon., 1914



Heptonstall Pace-Eggers, Yorks., 2007 (above)
Burton upon Stather PloughJags, Lincs. (below)



Times of Appearance



Research Difficulties

Too much information

Thousands of performance locations

Hundreds of scripts

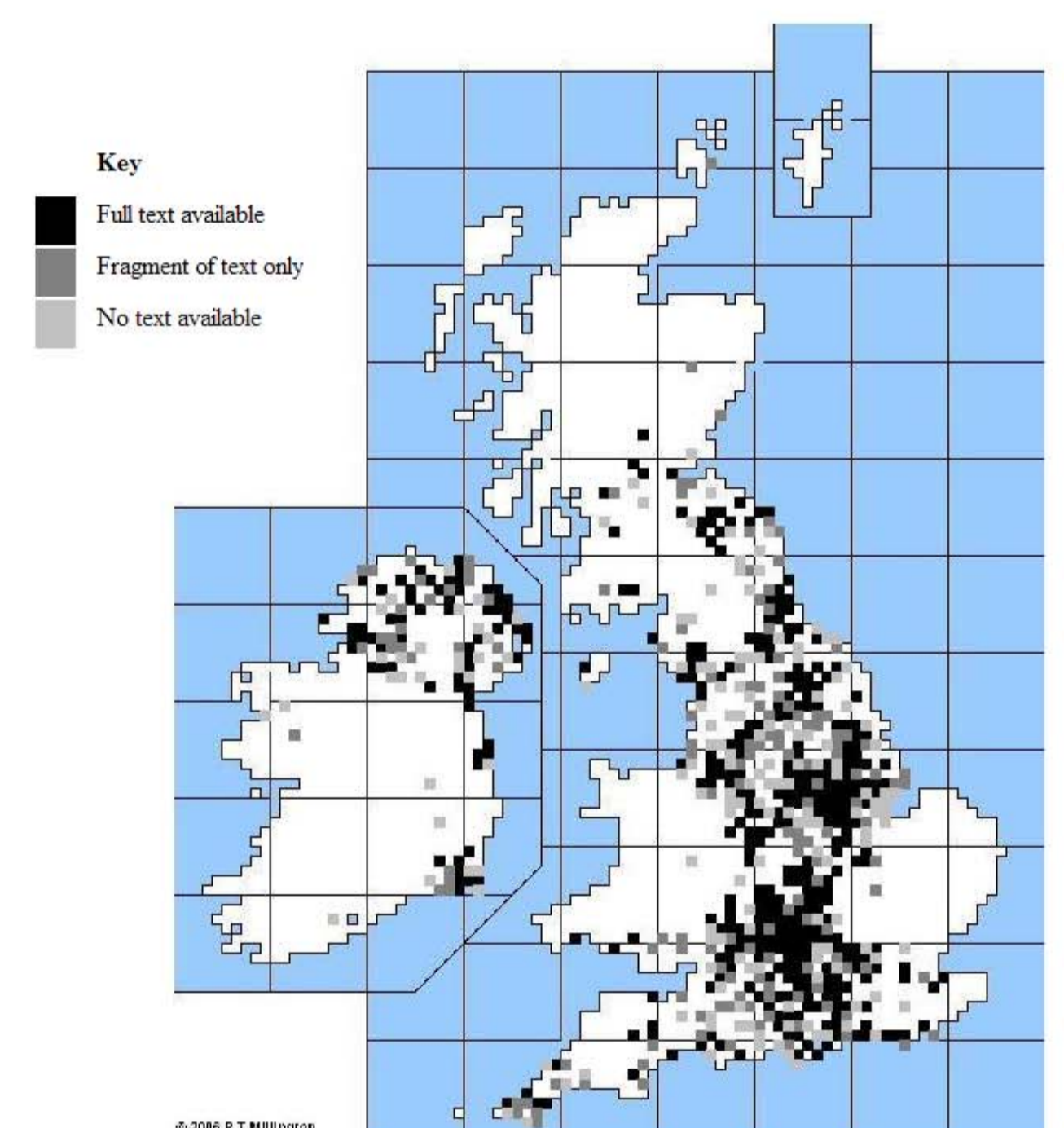
"...the texts obviously contain vital clues – if only we could just learn how to read them!"
E.Cass & S.Roud, 2002, p.18

Tantalising textual similarities

Significant textual variation

Where to start?

Map of Best Text Availability



Scripts Database

Over 180 full scripts plus some fragments

Focused on the earliest texts

Geographical coordinates of locations

Aiming for uniform geographical coverage

Digitally available as TEI-encoded texts

Derivative database of lines

Normalised – lower case, no punctuation, etc.

Typology - Std IDs group similar lines

Geographical Coverage of the Database



Applications

Scripts Explorer

Searching for lines

Investigating textual variants

Plotting distribution maps

Typical Outcomes

"Trivial" variants are often shown to be significant

Some "ubiquitous" lines turn out to be localised

Cluster dates help assess the genealogy of scripts

Online Resources

<http://www.folkplay.info/Texts.htm>

- The Folk Play Scripts Database

<http://www.mastermummers.org/scripts/explorer.htm>

- The Folk Play Scripts Explorer

<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/13>

My PhD thesis, with methodology

<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/937/>

- The main thesis conclusions



Distribution of Father Christmas
and the Turkish Knight
Unexpectedly localised

Some Variants of a Line

Oh here comes I Saint George a man of courage bold
I am Prince George a champion brave and bold
In comes I King George a man of courage bold
I am Saint George the noble champion bold
Here come I Saint George that valiant champion bold
In comes Saint George the champeon bold
Here comes Saint George the champion bold
Here comes I Prince George a champion bold
Here comes I Saint George that worthy champion bold
Here am I Saint George that worthy champion bold
I am Saint George that noble champion bold
Here comes I King George a man with courage bold
In comes I King George that man of courage bold
Here am I Saint George the man of courage bold
I am Prince George the champion bold
In comes I Saint George that man of courage bold
I am Saint George that worthy champion bold
In comes King George the noble champion bold
In comes I Sir George the champion bold
In comes I King George with courage stout and bold