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Millington, Peter (Completed: 2009) Mapping the uncharted territory of folk drama. In: Sites of Performance: Mapping/Theatre/History, 02-04 Apr 2009, University of Nottingham. (Unpublished)

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Sites of Performance: Mapping/Theatre/History,
University of Nottingham, 2-4 April 2009

Mapping the Uncharted Territory of Folk Drama

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English Folk Drama

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.

Heptonstall Pace Eggers, Yorks., 2007



<http://www.mastermummers.org/photos/Heptonstall2007.htm>

Plough Jags, Burton upon Stather, Lincs.



[http://www.folkplay.info/Forum/TD Forum 6 Burton upon Stather.htm](http://www.folkplay.info/Forum/TD_Forum_6_Burton_upon_Stather.htm)

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.

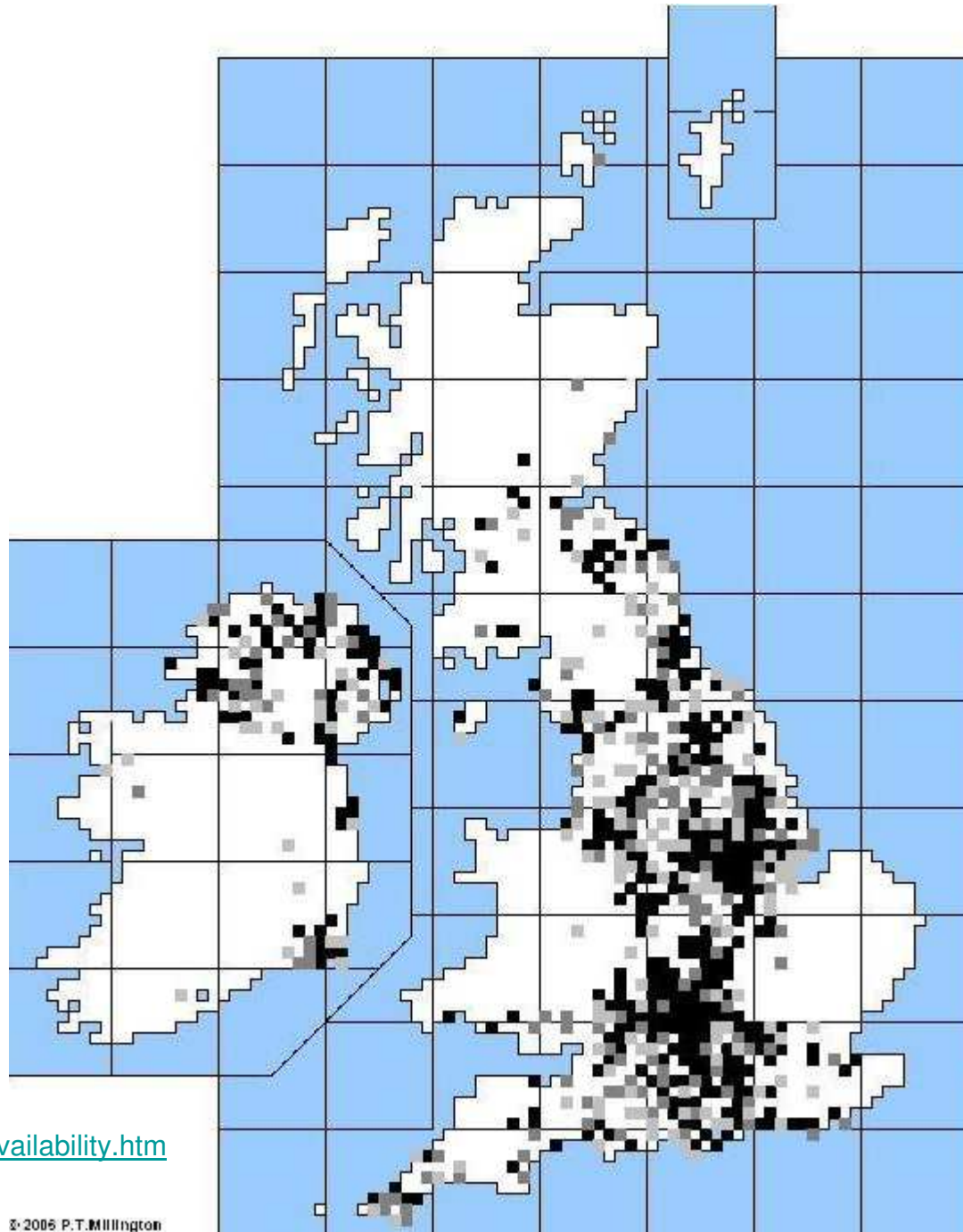
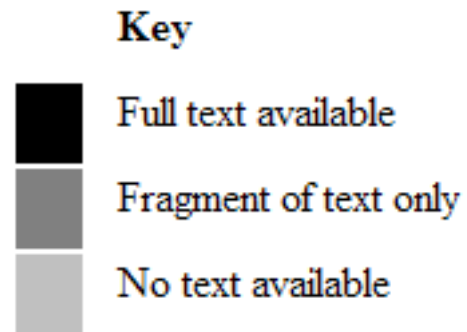
In comes I Turkey Knight,
come from Turkey land to fight,
I'll battle against you King George the man of courage
bold
if thy blood be hot I'll quickly make it cold.

Cuddesdon, Oxon., 1914

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?

Best Text Availability



<http://www.mastermummers.org/erd/besttextavailability.htm>

Similar Cast Lists?

Romsey, Hants., England

Father Christmas
Saint George
Turkish Knight
Doctor
Cut and Star
Poor and Mean
Bold Slasher
Twing Twang
Jolly Jack

Belfast, Northern Ireland

[Introducer]
Prince George
Turkey Champion
Doctor
St Patrick
Oliver Cromwell
Belzebub
Devil Doubt

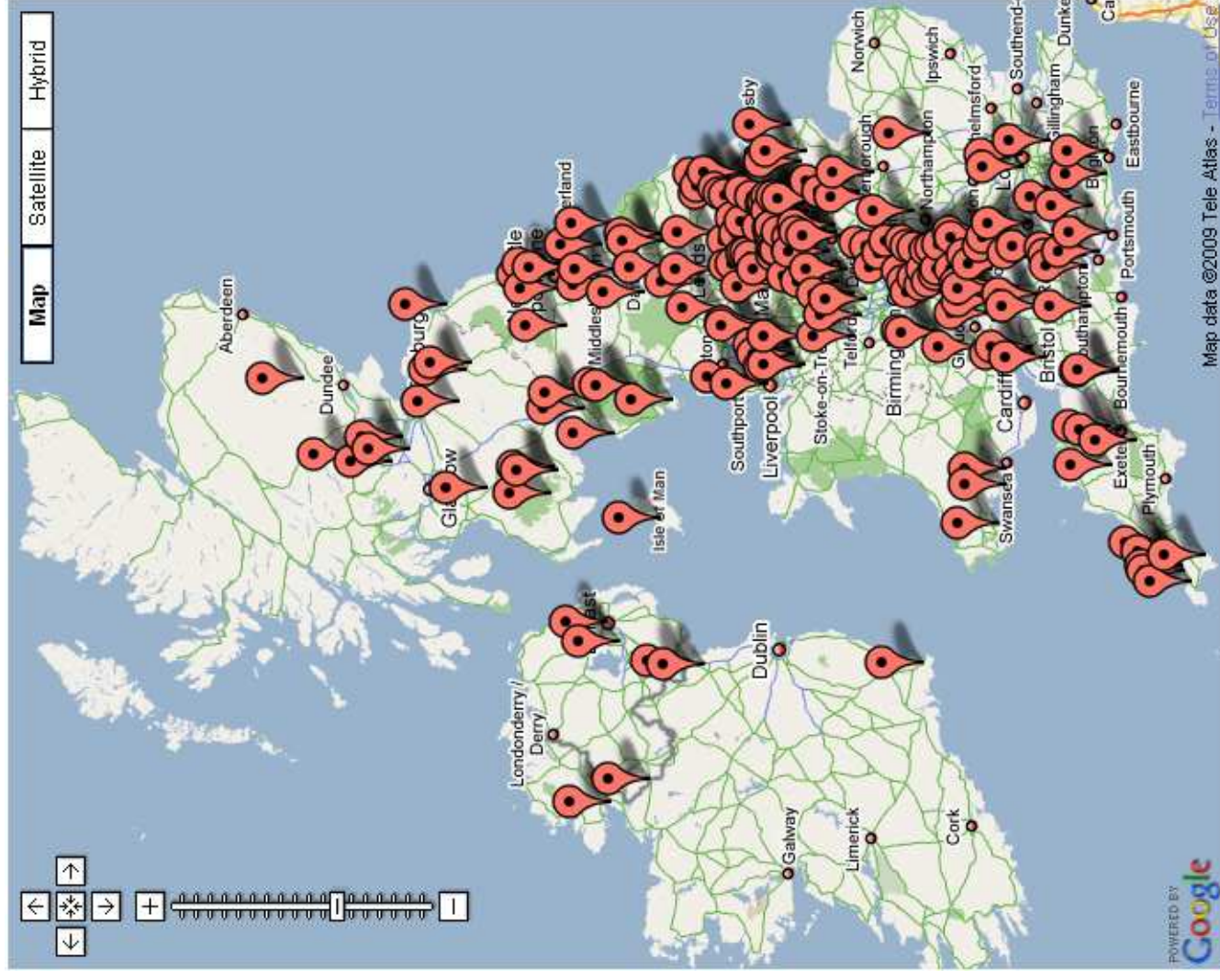
Some Variants of a Line

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

The Folk Play Scripts Database

- Over 180 full scripts plus some fragments
 - Focused on the earliest texts
 - Geographical coordinates for 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 Scripts 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

Distribution of Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight

Unexpectedly
localised

The two northern
locations represent the
homes of the compilers
of two composite
scripts that incorporate
southern material.



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/>
- 'The Origins and Development of English Folk Plays'
 - My PhD thesis, with methodology
- <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/937/>
- 'Textual Analysis of English Quack Doctor Plays: Some New Discoveries'
 - The main thesis conclusions

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