

Keynote Speech

Dr. Ian N. Gregory

Dr. Gregory holds a Ph.D. degree in Historical GIS (Geographical Information Systems) from the University of London. After doing an M.S. in GIS at the University of Edinburgh, Dr. Gregory got a one-year contract at Queen Mary, University of London working to create a GIS of some nineteenth century administrative data. Later this evolved into the Great Britain Historical GIS (GBHGIS), a major database that comprises the majority of statistical data from sources such as the census and vital registration data for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This took several years to build and over £500,000 of funding. After leaving London, Dr. Gregory worked at the University of Portsmouth and then as the Associate Director of Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis at the Queens University, Belfast. In September 2006 he moved to Lancaster to lead a new initiative in Digital Humanities. Dr. Gregory is on the editorial boards of the journals: *Social Science History* and *Historical Methods*. He is serving his second term as co-chair of the Social Science History Associations's Historical Geography network as well as his first term on their Executive Committee. Finally, Dr. Gregory is on the Institutional Board and Technical Steering Committee of the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative.



Abstract

Censuses, Literature and Newspapers: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Studying the Past with GIS

The use of GIS in historical research has now become widespread such that “Historical GIS” is now an accepted field (see <http://www.hgis.org.uk>). This has delivered new insights into historical topics as diverse as twentieth century environmental history, nineteenth century demography and medieval land-use. Much of this progress has been built on the early approaches to GIS which saw it as a quantitative tool that was best suited to handling polygon datasets. As a consequence much of the early work was on censuses and similar sources. While there is much to

be commended in this work, quantitative history is a relative small field. If GIS is to move towards being a tool for mainstream history, and indeed spread across the humanities more generally, the ability to handle a much broader range of sources is essential. The most important type of source in much of the humanities is, of course, the text.

In Literary Studies, recent work on the English Lake District showed that it was possible to turn literature of authors such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Gray into a GIS using place names. This allowed us to summarise the general patterns contained in different authors' work showing that they had very different conceptions of the place called the Lake District. The approach also allows researchers to explore the geographical aspects of the writing in detail by combining the texts with an interactive map (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/mappingthelakes>).

Applying this approach to larger sources can be achieved by using techniques from corpus linguistics. This will be demonstrated using an 800,000 word corpus of news-books published in seventeenth century London. These allow us to quickly explore not only where the news-books were talking about but also what they were saying about these places.