

Visioning Britain

Paul ELL, Queens University, Northern Ireland, paul.ell@qub.ac.uk

Humphrey SOUTHALL, University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom, Humphrey.Southall@port.ac.uk

"A Vision of Britain through Time" is a web interface to the Great Britain Historical GIS, funded by the UK National Lottery and designed for use by the general public, especially those interested in local history. It currently receives over 50,000 different visitors every month. It had been recommended by several national newspapers, most recently being listed by the Daily Telegraphy as one of "your 25 hot web sites for the summer". This presentation will review the historical sources on which the site is based, all of them geographical surveys of Britain but ranging from land use mapping by 1930s schoolchildren to the largest on-line library anywhere of historical British travel narratives. It will show how the site both assembles and disassembles them, giving users easy access to all the material relevant to their particular locality. The site contains far more textual material than conventional GIS resources, and also exposes its knowledge organisation frameworks to users and search engines; this leads to spectacularly high rankings in Google, much the most important source of visitors. The presentation will conclude with an initial presentation of the next version of the system, which provides an overall framework for Europe and includes information down to and below parishes for Sweden and Estonia, as well as Britain.