

# UK Electoral Geography and open data

**Chris Lightfoot**

(you may know me from such websites as...

<http://ex-parrot.com/~chris/wwwitter/>

<http://www.writetothem.com/>

<http://planning.beasts.org/>

<http://roughly.beasts.org/>

<http://politics.beasts.org/>

...)

# Why?

- Conduct an experiment into whether it is actually, *literally* possible to bore an audience rigid

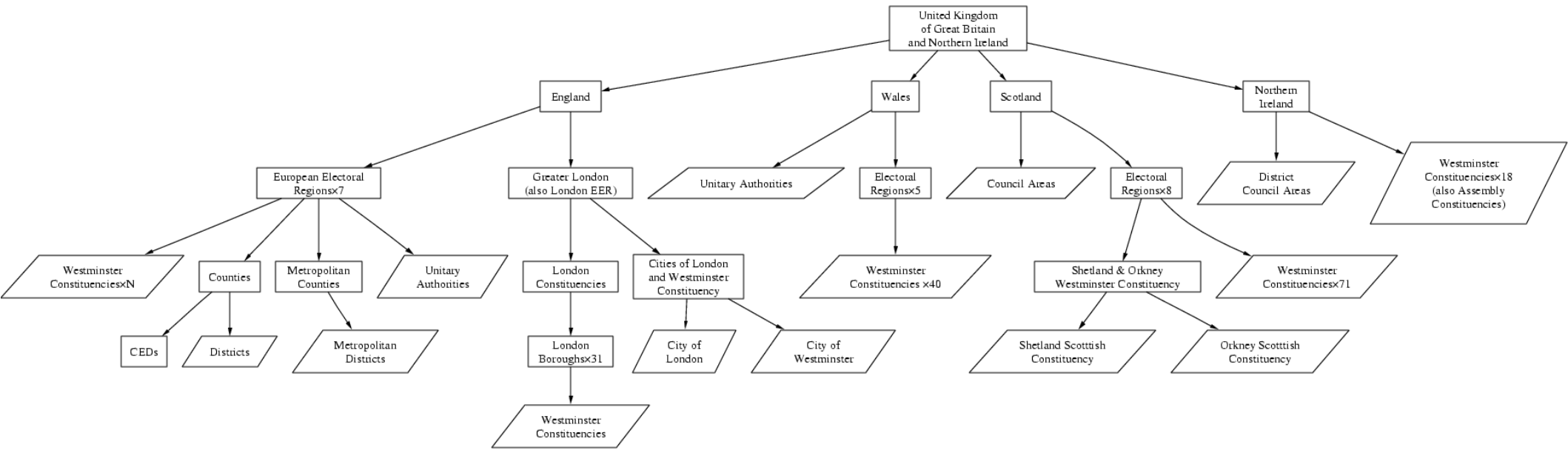
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- Actually this stuff is quite interesting
- ... and it is important

The UK's electoral geography is...  
quite complicated

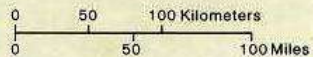


# The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- Four bits:
  - Two countries:
    - England
    - Scotland
  - One principality
    - Wales
  - One “province” (depending on which side you’re on)
    - Northern Ireland

# United Kingdom

- International boundary
- ★ National capital
- +— Railroad
- Road





# Government Office Regions

(+NI, Scotland, Wales)

- Places where, err, the government has offices?
- Statistical geography
- Coterminous with European Electoral Regions

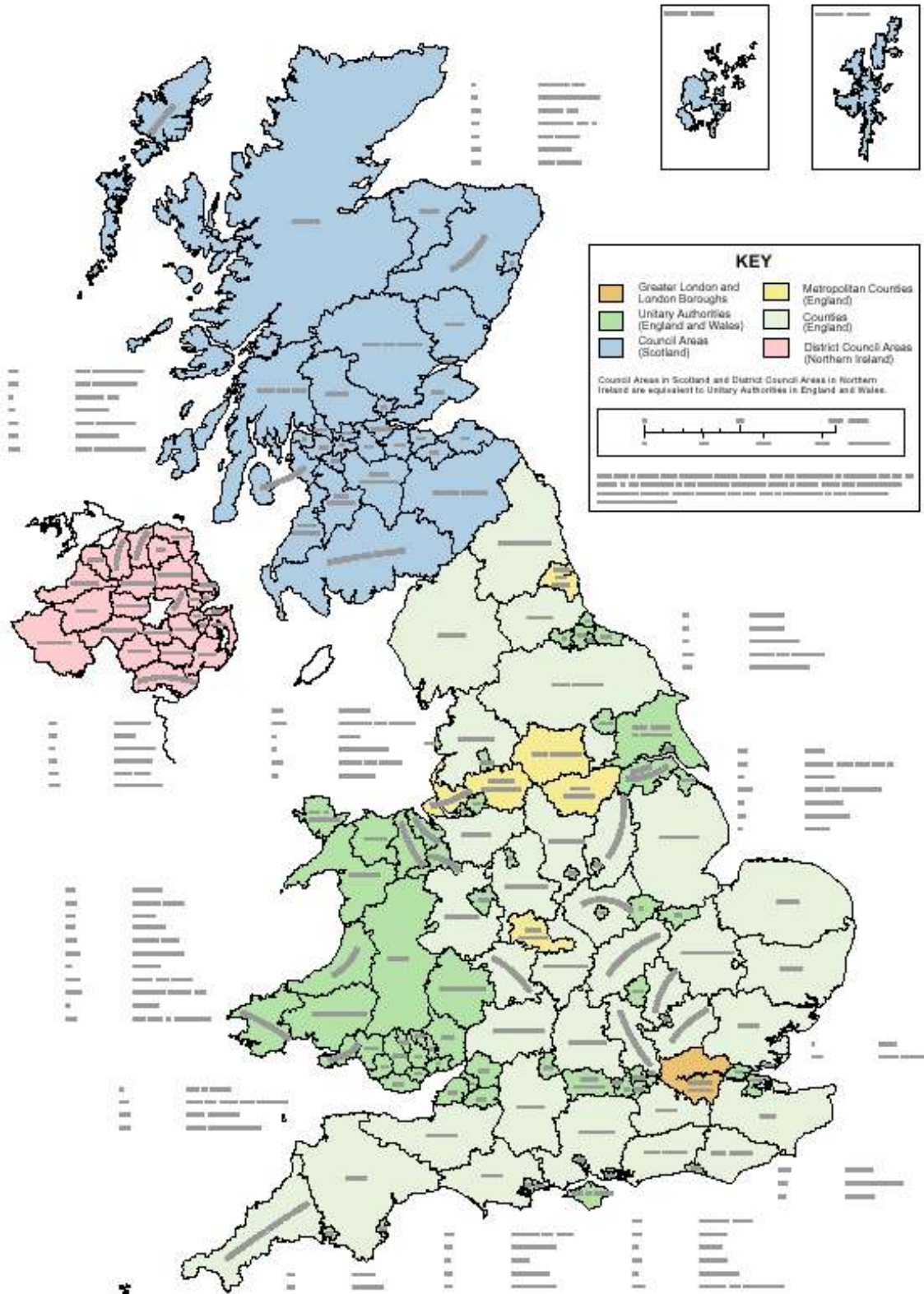






# Counties

- English counties have been established ~1300 years
- But they keep moving them around
- Transport, education, libraries, police, ...

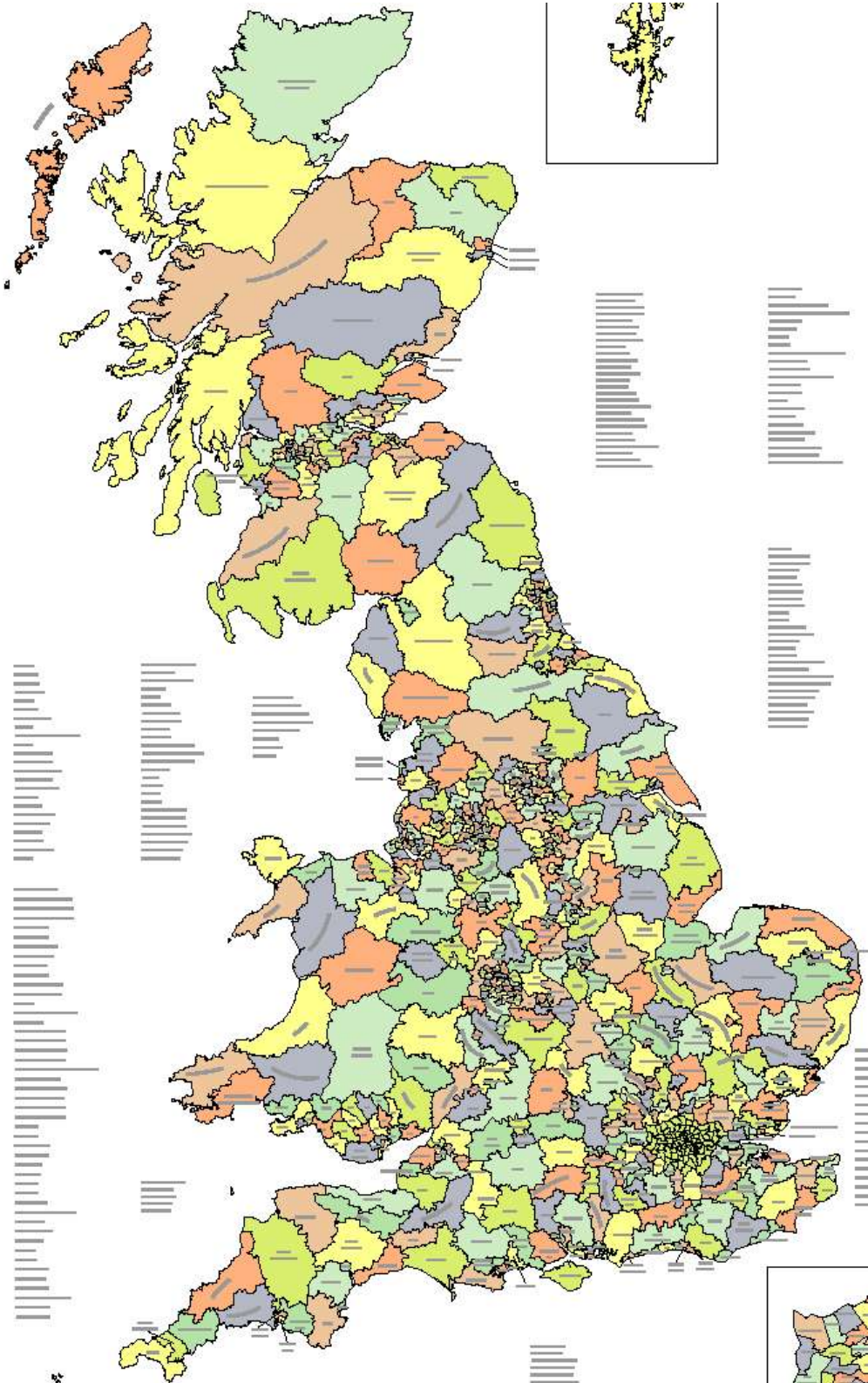


# District authorities

- Relatively recent (19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Municipal stuff: drains, rubbish, planning, ...

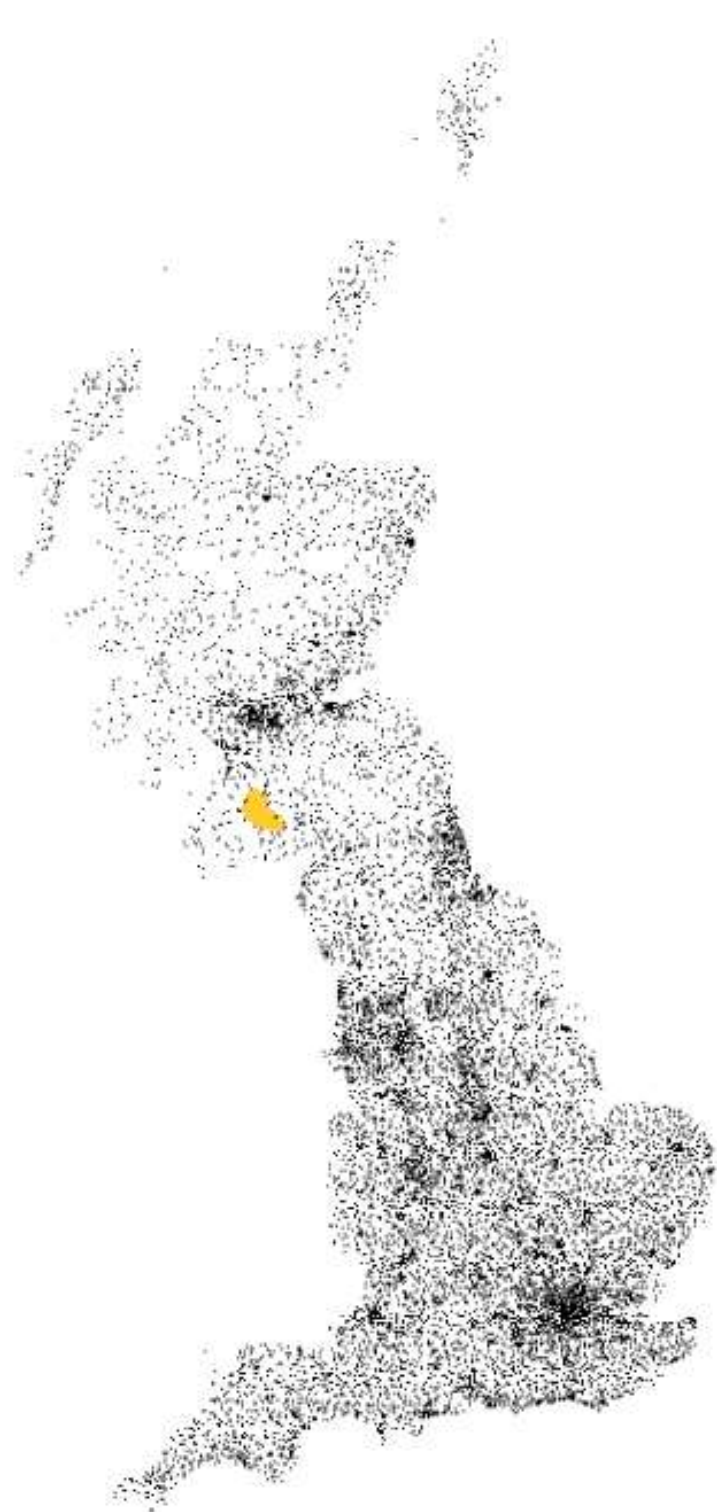
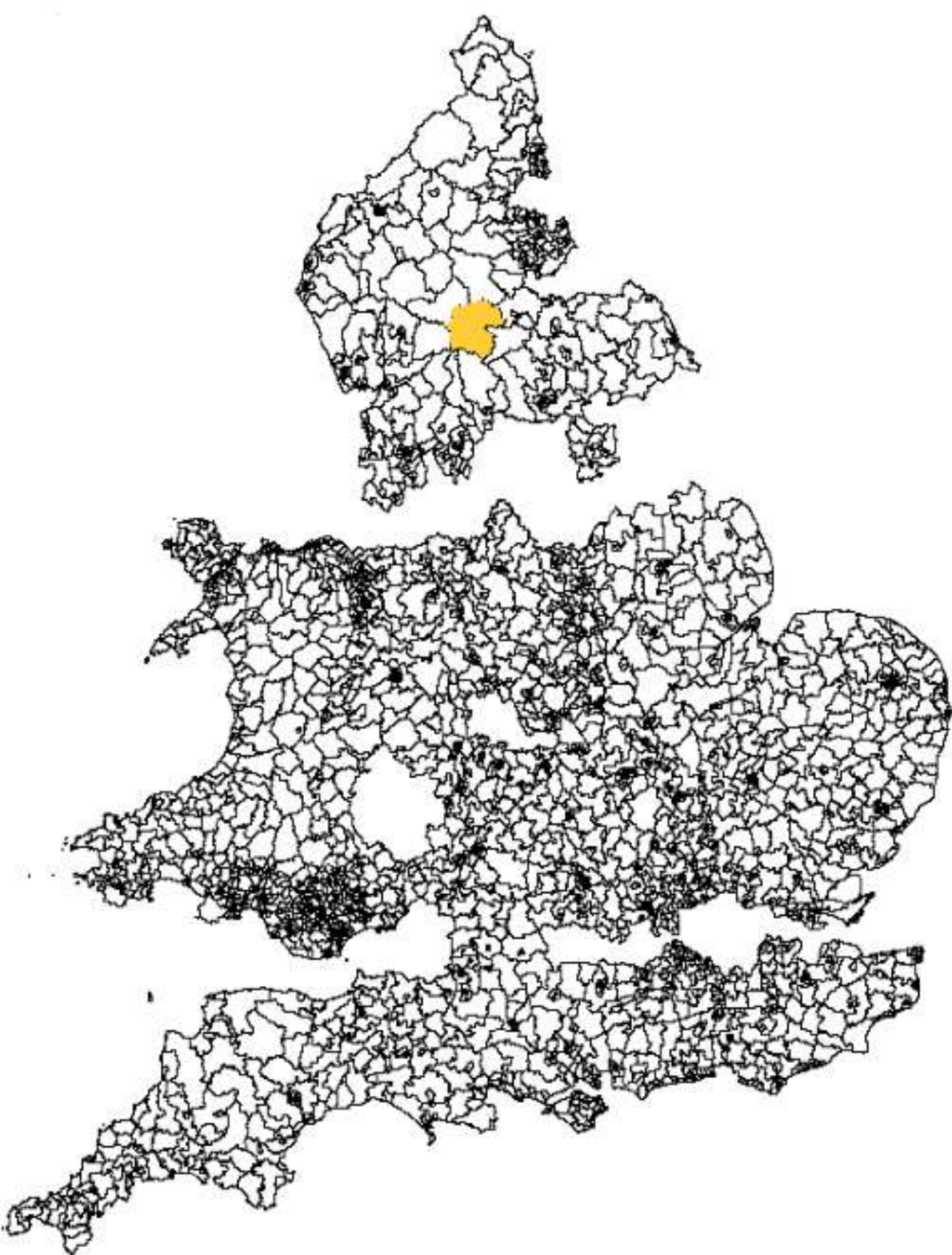






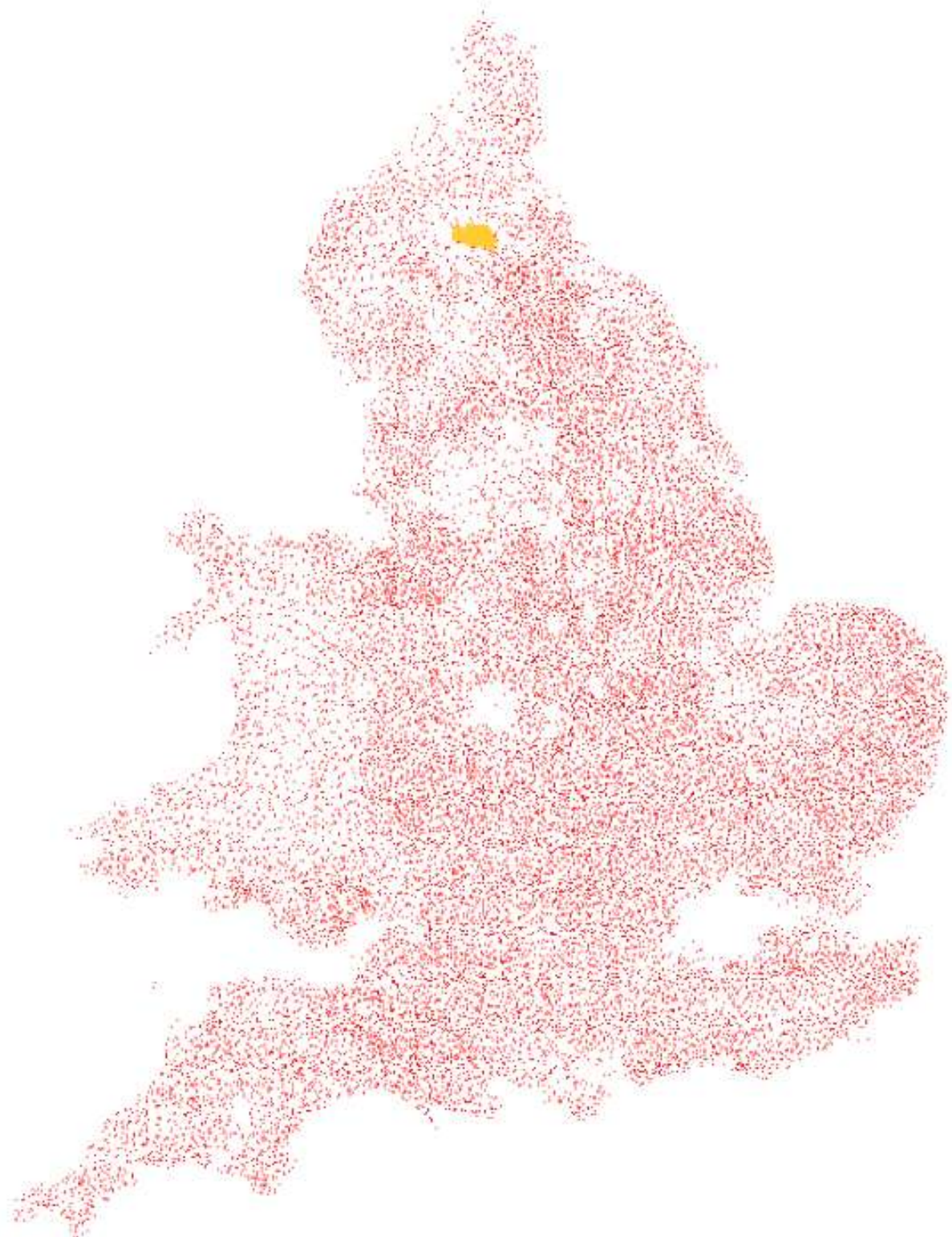
# Wards and electoral divisions

- Electoral units within each district and county, respectively
- Constituencies are made up of wards (in principle)
- Wards are made up of parishes (in principle)



# Parishes

- Very old indeed (1500 years?)
- Have had civil functions ('civic parish') for almost as long
- Smallest unit of geography for statistics and administration



# What's this useful for?

The image shows two overlapping browser windows. The left window displays the WriteToThem.com website, which is a platform for contacting UK politicians. The right window displays a profile page on TheyWorkForYou.com for Anne Campbell, a former Labour MP for Cambridge.

**WriteToThem.com** Beta Test

Contact your Councillors, MP, MEPs, MSPs, Welsh and London Assembly Members for

First, type your UK postcode:

If you don't know your Postcode you can try [this Postcode Finder](#)

Not voting on 5th May? Or know someone who isn't? [NotApathetic.com](#) is

The new FaxYourMP. [Built by mySociety](#). [Data by GovEval](#).  
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**TheyWorkForYou.com** beta


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Recent appearances

**Anne Campbell, former MP**



- Former Labour MP for Cambridge
- Left Parliament on 11 April 2005
- Majority: 8,579 voters

- [Voting record](#)
- [Performance data](#)
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**Email this page to a friend**

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**Search this MP's speeches**

**More useful links for this MP**

- [Anne Campbell's personal website](#)
- Biographies from [The Guardian](#) & [BBC News](#)
- [Parliamentary career](#) (From The Guardian)
- [Election results for](#)

**Voting record**

How Anne Campbell voted on key issues in the 2001-2005 parliament (From Public Whip) :

- **Very strongly for** introducing **foundation hospitals**.  
[votes, speeches](#)
- **Moderately for** introducing **student top-up fees**.

Done

MINDLESS AdBlock

# But...

- Only digital copies of data are from OS
- ... and they're expensive (of course)

Can this data be opened?



# How?

- Geographies are established by secondary legislation
- So the data is free, right? (Well, Crown Copyright, anyway)

# But...

- Secondary legislation refers to:
  - other extant, geographies
  - maps (not free, nor published on the web)
  - descriptions of walking the boundary(!)
- Different in England, NI, Scotland, Wales
  - and for different tiers
- Google for:  
"boundaries order" site:legislation.hmso.gov.uk
- It's a big job

# Why is this important?

- Fundamental to the electoral process
- Only one source of the data
- Barrier-to-entry for new political projects

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## Postal votes 'wide-open to fraud'

The judge in a vote-rigging trial says the postal voting system is "wide open to fraud" and has strongly attacked the government's attitude to the problem.

Richard Mawrey QC was speaking as he ruled there had been "widespread fraud" in six Birmingham council seats won last year by Labour.

He accused the government of being not only complacent, but "in denial", about the failings of the system.

More people than ever are preparing to vote by post in the general election.

### 'Steal me' envelopes



The hearings were seen as a test case over postal voting



#### SEE ALSO:

- ▶ [Judge upholds ruling on postal votes](#)  
04 Apr 05 |
- ▶ [Judge hits out at government over postal voting](#)  
22 Mar 05 |
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