

Title: Texting the past. Medieval writing — who needs spell check?

Abstract: 1150–1300 was period of radical change in the English language. At a time when there was no fixed ‘correct’ spelling, the written language was affected by numerous variables, including contemporary scribes’ responses to multilingualism, regional diversity and developments in styles of script. Early Middle English scribes devised spelling systems characterised by flexible matrices of substitution and variation. Interpreting the systems sometimes requires the imaginative logic needed for any substitutional code or word game. This lecture illustrates how the work involved in making *A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* has aided this kind of interpretation, and in some cases has led to the resolution of textual cruces.