

# Any Teletubbies Caught in the Web?

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# Any Teletubbies Caught in the Web?

*Helle Strandgaard Jensen*

*Abstract: Account of two-day research mission to London with the aim to find inspiration for new research project that uses web sources to write childhood history.*

*Keywords: British Library, search, interface, childhood, Teletubbies*

## ANY TELETTUBBIES AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

The aim of my WARCnet-funded trip to London was to investigate the possibilities of using the British Web archive for a new research project. I wanted to familiarize myself with the British Library where the collection is held and understand better the differences between the part of the web archive that is available online and that which is available in the reading rooms, and I wanted to talk to researchers who have worked with archived web previously. The latter in order to better understand the possible range and make-up of tools I would have to familiarize myself with to work with the re-born digital sources (Brügger 2018).

In my new project, I am interested in debates about children's media as they have played out in public in recent decades. Seeing that the WWW is increasingly an integral part of public life, using archived Web sources is an inescapable part of the research I need to undertake.

The project, as currently planned, will take the form of 14-17 essays all centered around one popular children's media phenomenon, often of international significance. I will look at the reception of and discussion around phenomena such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *My Little Pony*, *Teletubbies*, *Cocomelon*, *The Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, *Peppa Pig*, *The little Mermaid*, as well as some more local Danish phenomena such as *Onkel Reje*, *Cirkeline*, and *John Dillermand*. Investigating these phenomena, I hope to answer why these debates recur, and what the focus on children's media tells us of understandings of childhood and cultural negotiations in a globalized, neo-liberal area.

Unfortunately, due to train strikes in the UK during my visit, I was not able to meet up with staff from the British Library and a possible rescheduling fell through because of Easter. Exploring the part available online on my own, however, I found that the search tools developed by the library were well-equipped for finding items for close reading. I could search for particular words within a certain distance of each other. This worked well in the

case of for instance the controversy around the Teletubbies and homosexuality where I could, for instance, search for any instances where 'Teletubbies' and 'gay' were closer than 10 words (Figure 1).

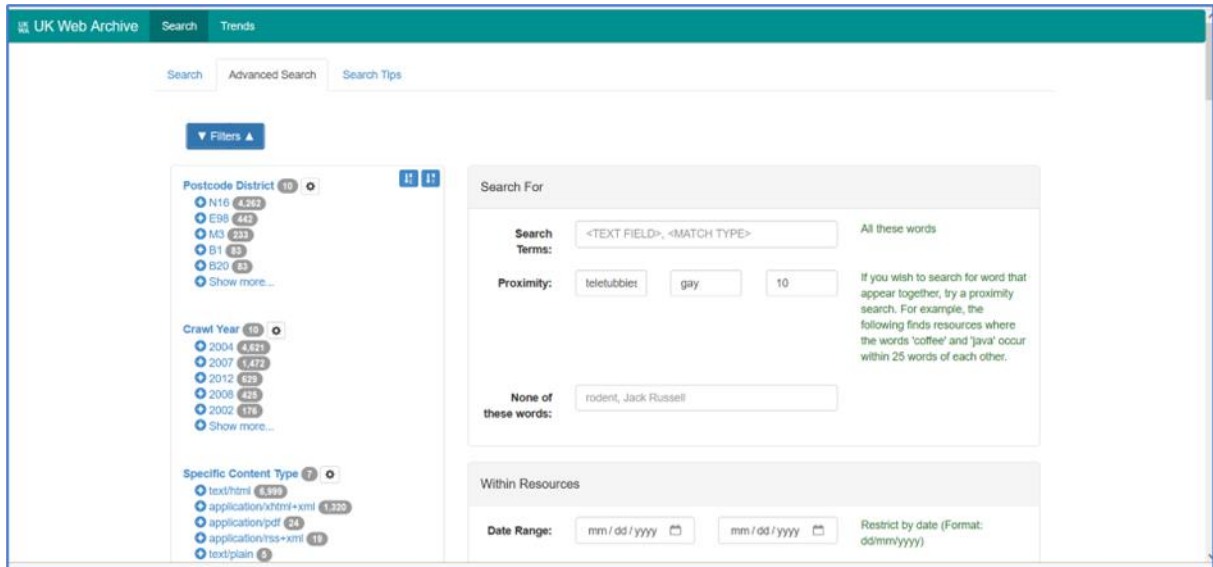


Figure 1

Distant reading was more difficult. While the “trends” graph in the GUI search interface does indeed provide a graph with all the mentions of Teletubbies or Tinky Winky (the purple Teletubby with a red handbag accused of promoting homosexuality), I could not export the underlying data and examples of data points only showed randomly underneath the graph (see Figure 2).

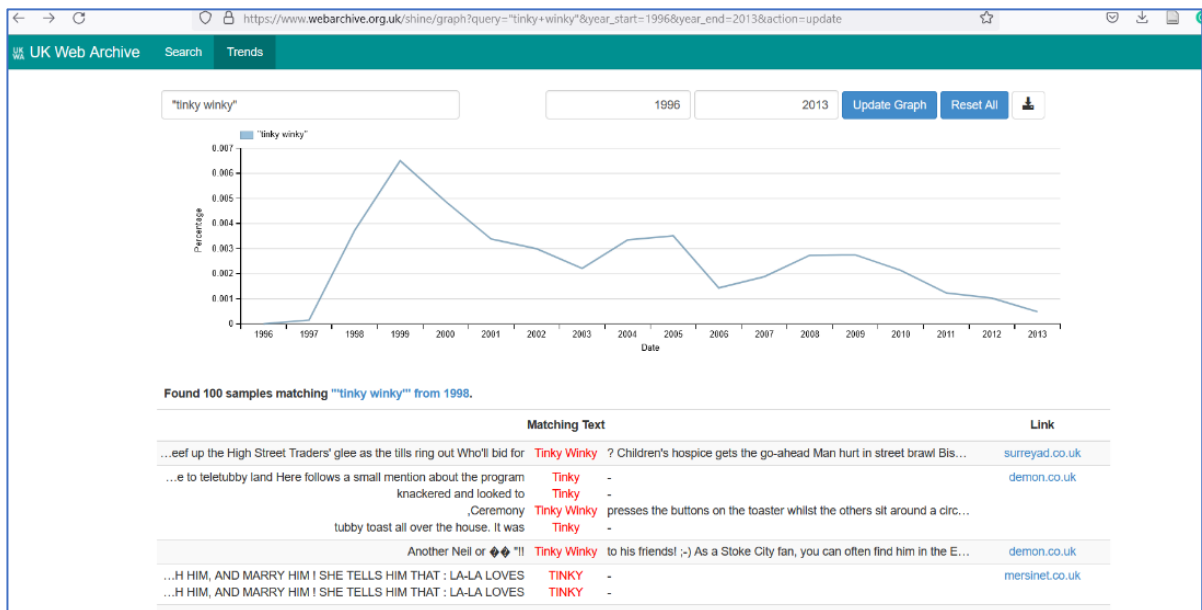


Figure 2

To do various distant readings of information from the UK Web archive I plan to use this GLAM Workbench <https://glam-workbench.net/web-archives/>

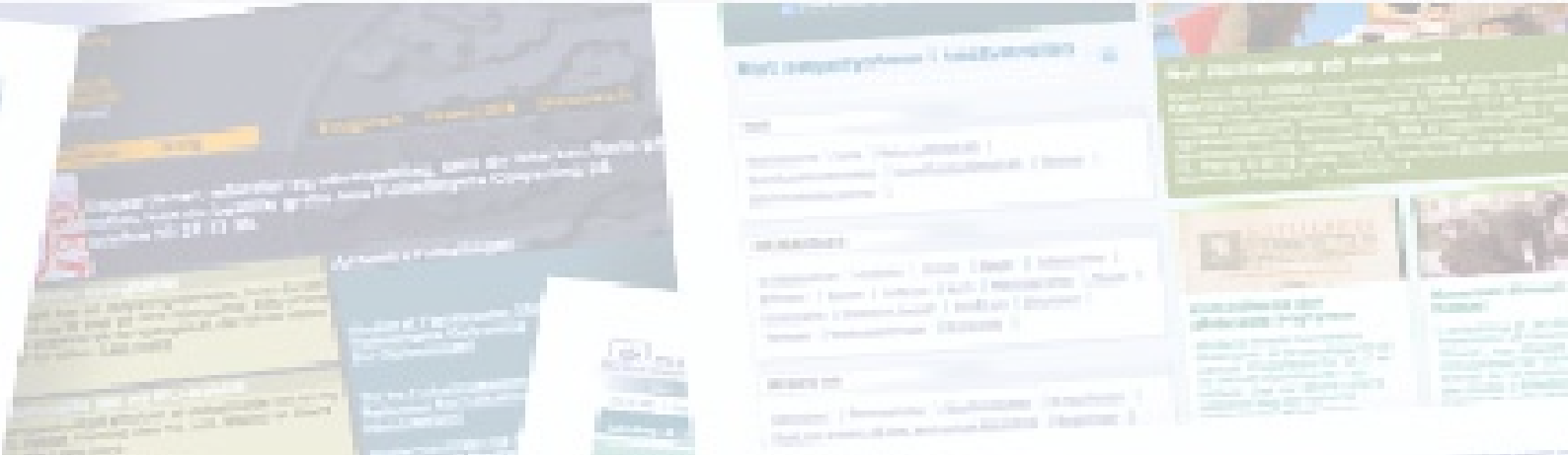
I hope the workbench will be complimentary to the Archives Unleashed tool kit's Jupiter notebooks. From my various meetings with London-based researchers who have worked with the archived web before, including SoMe material, it became clear, that if I want to do this without the help of a developer, I'll need to talk to people who have experience with the digital methods I want to use.

Talking to these researchers about my project and how I want to use archived Web material, it became clear that finding previous examples of how such work has been done and getting in touch with individuals who are willing to share insights about that work is key. Besides the suggestions given to me during the conversations in London, *The SAGE Handbook of Web History* (Brügger & Milligan, 2019) provides useful information in this regard and will be the first place to look for case studies that might match what I want to do.

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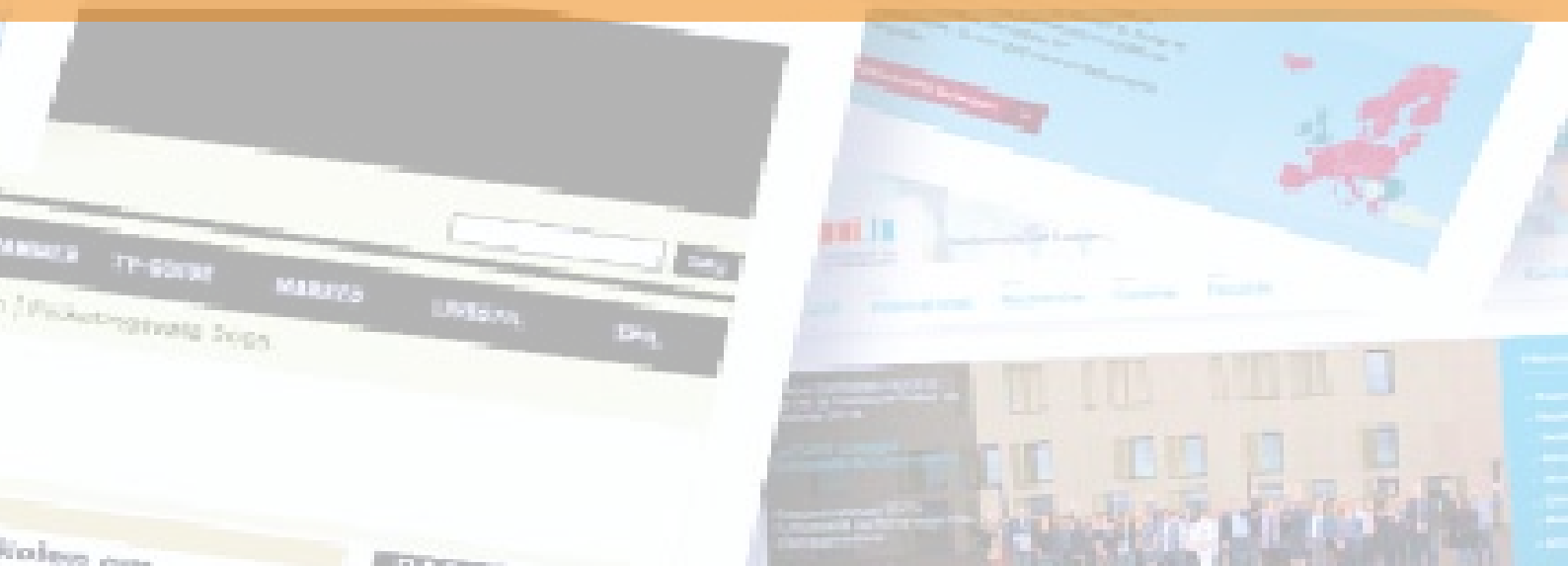
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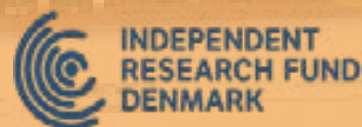


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The aim of the WARCnet network is to promote high-quality national and transnational research that will help us to understand the history of (trans)national web domains and of transnational events on the web, drawing on the increasingly important digital cultural heritage held in national web archives. The network activities run in 2020-22, hosted by the School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, and are funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark | Humanities (grant no 9055-00005B).



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