



The National Archives

The loss of the MV Derbyshire – The National Archives releases its most significant digital collection to date

The National Archives is releasing unique audio-visual records from the 1997 investigation into the tragic sinking of the Motor Vessel Derbyshire.

The Derbyshire sank with its entire crew during a typhoon in the South China Sea in 1980. Following an inconclusive initial formal inquiry, the Derbyshire Family Association campaigned for a more detailed investigation into the tragedy. The subsequent lessons learned led to widespread safety improvements, contributing to a dramatic reduction in loss of life at sea.

The release of the records, over 240 gigabytes of data, is a major step towards the future of archives, as official records move from paper-based to digital. These records have been loaded into The National Archives' Digital Object Store for permanent preservation, and some key material has been made freely available online.

Giving an insight into how government archives will be accessed in the future, these key extracts from the investigation into the tragedy are now available via [Electronic Records Online](#).

Extracts of particular interest include:

- A number of virtual reality reconstructions of the sinking of the ship (click [here](#) to view an example)
- More than 200 hours of underwater video footage

- 100,000 still images of the wreck site (click [here](#) to view an example)
- Deep Ocean Survey digital records

Adrian Brown, head of Digital Preservation Research at The National Archives, said: “Working on the digital records from the MV Derbyshire investigation has been one The National’s Archives most challenging projects to date. Digital records are considerably more fragile than paper or parchment, and a lot of work has been done to ensure that they are held in stable formats that will stand the test of time. The release of these records is a testament to the skills and innovative thinking that are taking The National Archives into the 21st century.”

Howard Davies, head of Information Management Consultants at The National Archives, added: “The records of the MV Derbyshire enquiry provided some original challenges for The National Archives. They are the first records to come to us with such volumes of digital moving imagery and with the computer generated virtual simulations.

“It is important for the records of this significant enquiry to be preserved to inform future decision taking, and we are pleased to have developed technical solutions which mean the records will remain accessible to the public for years to come.”

The reports of the first formal investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire, held in 1987, reached the conclusion that the Derbyshire “was probably overcome by the forces of nature in Typhoon Orchid”.

However, the Derbyshire Families Association, set up following the tragedy, was greatly disappointed by the inconclusive report. They requested an underwater survey, which was initially delayed as the exact location of the ship was unknown and adequate technology was not yet available to obtain photographic evidence.

The re-opened investigation, conducted between 1997 and 1998, concluded that the loss of the vessel was caused by seawater entering the bow section, which caused the vessel to sit lower in the water. The investigation resulted in a total of 24 safety recommendations, which have now been addressed in maritime regulations and guidance.

Paper records of the original inquiry are also available alongside the digitised re-opened investigation.

- Ends -

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Notes for editors

To find out more about The National Archives' work in guaranteeing the long-term survival of digital records, please follow the links below:

- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/digital.htm
- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk is a **government department**; and also an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

The Vision of the National is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone

