



Press Release

12th March 2003

Digital Heritage, Lost Forever?

How many of us save copies of our emails, or regularly copy our Microsoft Word files backed up on CD-R onto fresh media? Without this practice, large quantities of information about the world in which we live is in danger of being lost without trace.

'While Domesday Book, the oldest public record, is available for the public to view at The National Archives, the first ever email is no longer in existence. We know nothing about it, other than it was in upper case. This gap in our digital heritage means that historians of the future may not be able to read the letters of today's artists, writers and politicians', says David Ryan, Head of Archive Services at The National Archives.

Government departments and private businesses are increasingly using information technology to conduct and support the business they do. Ordinary people today are also sending emails instead of posting letters and cards. But how many of these digital messages are being preserved for future generations?

To address the problem of *digital preservation*, The National Archives has developed a digital archive to store government records that are produced electronically, so-called *born digital* records. This digital archive system is capable of storing over 100 terabytes of data, which is equal to 1.5 billion pages of text, and will store and provide access to information that is far more diverse than that contained on the paper files that we are used to.

It will include sound and graphics files, virtual reality models, and even video footage. The first documents to be stored will include the records of a number of high-profile public enquiries, departmental websites, and the records of parliamentary committees and royal commissions.

Members of the public visiting the reading rooms at the National Archives in Kew will be available to access the holdings of the Digital Archive. There are also future plans for these digital records to be available to the public over the Internet.

Notes for Editors:

- The Public Record Office, the national archive of England, Wales and the United Kingdom, will come together with the Historic Manuscripts Commission on the 2nd April 2003 to become The National Archives. The TNA is open to the public to carry out research 6 days a week. It holds over 1000 years of documents including sources for family history research.
- For more information on digital preservation please contact Robert Taylor in the Digital Preservation Department at the TNA, tel: 020 8392 5268, e-mail Robert.taylor@nationalarchives.gov.uk

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