



## **Press Release**

24 January 2006

### **200 – year old seeds to be grown**

#### **The National Archives and Kew's Millennium Seed Bank to germinate 19<sup>th</sup> century seeds**

The National Archives, Kew, is working together with The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, to grow seeds that are 200 years old. The seeds – found in the archives – have been sent to the Millennium Seed Bank, West Sussex, to see if they can be germinated.

Over 30 different types of seeds were found in The National Archives and a few of each variation have been sent to the Millennium Seed Bank. Included within the collection is the 'King Protea', the national flower of South Africa, and seeds of 'Brown-beard Sugarbrush' and 'Glossy-eyed Parachute Daisy'.

Researchers, working on improvements to The National Archives catalogue, discovered the seeds in a red leather notebook while they were exploring the High Court of Admiralty prize papers in the HCA 32 series. The seeds were wrapped in paper envelopes with their scientific names inscribed in Latin. The notebook held the name Jan Teerlink from Flushing (Vlissingen), Holland, who is believed to have collected the seeds from the Cape of Good Hope before being captured by the British in 1803.

A number of ships from the Dutch East India Company were captured around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and brought back to the UK. Their papers ended up in the High Court of Admiralty as the British sailors would use them as proof of capture for their prize money (the money they received for bringing a ship and its men back as prisoners).

The ship carrying the seeds was believed to have been called 'Henrietta' and the papers found in the collection show that it had been on a voyage to collect goods from around the world. The ship's records show that it had been to Java; also found in the wallet were scraps of silk collected from China in 1802. Other treasures found among the Dutch ship's papers include early editions of Dutch books and music manuscripts.

Alistair Hanson, a specialist researcher at The National Archives, said, 'In 2005 we embarked on a project to further investigate the High Court of Admiralty papers. We wanted to discover more about the contents of the bundles of documents held within the series. Our research had already identified the Muster Rolls and Helmsman's Log found from French ships captured at the Battle of Trafalgar. When Dr Van Gelder from the Royal Dutch Library approached us to investigate the Dutch High Court of Admiralty papers we jumped at the opportunity to see what other treasures they hold.

'When we found the seeds we wondered whether they could be grown and decided to contact our neighbours at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, to see if they would be interested in taking a look at the seeds. Initial talks with researchers there identified the seeds and that there was a slim chance that they could be germinated. Working with our conservation department we were

able to extract a selection of the seeds and send them to the Millennium Seed Bank in Wakehurst Place.'

Trevor Butler, at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank project, said, 'This is a very exciting find for The National Archives and is a great opportunity for us to work closely with them on a project. Although it is normally very hard to germinate seeds of this age, the precise storage conditions of The National Archives means that there is a small chance that our researchers can grow the seeds. It will be very exciting for the Millennium Seed Bank botanists to watch the progress of the seeds and see whether they will germinate.'

These two exciting finds have generated new interest in the High Court of Admiralty series of files and there are plans for future cataloguing projects at The National Archives to examine this series in greater detail. It is known to hold a range of papers from American ships captured in the War of Independence as well as documents from Spanish and Danish vessels.

**For more information:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

The National Archives, Kew, [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history, from Domesday Book to newly released government papers. The free museum and research rooms are open to the public 6 days a week.

Over nine million records are available to view at Kew and some, including wills, First World War Army medal cards and Second World War Seamen's medal records, are also available online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline)

The Family Records Centre, Islington, which is jointly managed by The National Archives and the Office for National Statistics, holds the indexes (not the certificates themselves) for births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from July 1837 and also copies of wills, before 1858, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and some other church courts.