



Press Release

6 December 2004

First Surviving Printed Document In England Goes On Display

The first surviving document printed in England goes on display today as part of a new exhibition, ***Movers and Shakers: Geoffrey Chaucer to Elton John***, which launches at **The National Archives** today, Monday 6 December.

The document, an indulgence, was printed by William Caxton at Westminster on 13 December 1476. The printed text looks similar to handwriting used in government documents during the mid 1400s.

In the fifteenth century, if you were given an indulgence by a clergyman your sins would be forgiven if you agreed to support church causes and projects. This indulgence, written in Latin, was issued by John Sant, Abbot of Abingdon, to Henry and Katherine Lanley for their financial contribution to the raising of a fleet to attack the Turks.

Caxton, born in Kent in 1421, worked abroad as a diplomat and merchant. While in Europe, he became interested in the new technology of printing developed by Johannes Gutenberg during the early 1450s. Caxton returned to England and set up a printing shop near Westminster Abbey where he used a flat bed wooden hand-press which remained the same for over 350 years. He printed over 100 books including Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'.

Caxton is one of 17 Movers and Shakers who make up the new exhibition at The National Archives. Other 'Movers and Shakers' include: Geoffrey Chaucer, Henry VIII, Edmund Halley, Charles Dickens, Francis Crick and Winston Churchill.

The Printing Process

In the printing process, ink was spread over the raised surfaces of individual metal letters held within a frame. The printer then pressed this against a sheet of paper, screwing down the press by hand. Printing presses were first invented in the Rhineland in Germany. The craftsmen there were used to building grape presses for making wine and applied the same methods to building printing presses.

Sue Laurence, Interpretation Manager at the National Archives, said: "Caxton's printed indulgence is a real gem. To have the first surviving printed document in our care is a privilege. We take printing for granted these days, but the amount of work that went into this particular document is astonishing."

Lucy Fulton, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer at The National Archives, said:

"Archives hold a mass of colourful information that many of us would not even guess is there. The fifteenth century indulgence, on show as part of the Movers and Shakers exhibition, is a

great example - it tells us so much about how our ancestors lived, how they were governed and what they thought. This exhibition gives a taste of the fascinating material held in archives across the UK."

Further information, a full list of Movers and Shakers, interviews and images are available by contacting Lawrence Hall on 020 8392 5712 or 07813 115 129 or via email:

lawrence.hall@mission-21.com

Notes to Editors:

- The National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk Kew, west London, has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history. It offers the public free access to vast collections of family history sources including military service records, ships' passenger lists, slave registers and tax records. The Family Records Centre, in Islington, holds census information from 1841, wills and birth, death and marriage certificates. The research rooms at The National Archives and at the Family Records Centre are open to the public 6 days a week.
- Movers and Shakers: Geoffrey Chaucer to Elton John runs from Monday 6 December to 31 May 2005 and is a free exhibition.

The National Archives is situated on Ruskin Avenue, Kew. Kew Gardens (tube and rail) and Kew Bridge (rail) are the nearest tube and rail links. Via car the access is off the Mortlake Road (A205) and parking is free.

The National Archives is open from Monday, Wednesday & Friday: 09:00 - 17:00, Tuesday & Thursday 10:00 - 19:00 and Saturday 09:30 - 17:00. Admission is free.

Over 480 events are taking place across the UK this autumn for Archive Awareness Campaign, which aims to reveal the treasures of the archives to the public. The campaign, run by partners the National Council on Archives, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and The National Archives, is now in its second year. For more information about Archive Awareness Campaign please visit www.archiveawareness.com or contact Lucy Fulton, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer Tel: 020 8392 5237 Email: lucy.fulton@nationalarchives.gov.uk