

BT digital archives

- UK's telecoms heritage now online -

A £1 million project to digitise BT's historical collection of photos and documents has today brought 165 years of UK telecoms heritage to the public's fingertips with the launch of an interactive online archive.

Jisc, who provide digital services for UK education and research, funded Coventry University and partners, BT and The National Archives, to digitise over 500,000 photographs, reports and correspondence preserved by BT since 1846 - and create a searchable online catalogue.

For the first time this remarkable collection - which is recognised by UNESCO and Arts Council England as being of international importance - will be accessible to a global audience. Users from around the world will be able to log on to www.bt.com/btdigitalarchives and explore 50 terabytes worth of images and documents showcasing Britain's pioneering role in the development of telecommunications and the impact of the technology on society.

The records detail how Britain laid the foundations for global telecommunications, from the first telephone exchange in 1879 to the Queen making the first automatic long distance telephone call in the fifties.

Highlights from the BT digital archives include:

- documents relating to the establishment of BT's ancestor company, the Electric Telegraph Company, which in 1846 became the first of its kind in the world;
- a letter from 1877 from Alexander Graham Bell's agent offering Bell's telephone to the British government - who turned it down

- photos of Britain's first telephone kiosks with concept drawings and correspondence detailing their design and public reaction to their introduction;
- pictorial records of the advent of the world's first emergency call service, 999.
- an image of Central Telegraph Office staff dealing with telegrams about the birth in 1948 of Prince Charles
- Notes from Winston Churchill and an image of him working next to an early 'golfball' candlestick telephone in 1915 - the telephone handset had incorrectly been replaced upside down after a call
- photographs of bomb damaged streets and buildings around the UK during WWII
- documents illustrating the role of British telecommunications workers in the war effort during both world wars
- An image of Jane Cain, the telephone operator and actress recording Speaking Clock messages in 1935

The project and its new website – which has been built by Coventry University's Serious Games International – is a valuable online resource for anyone interested in social history including teachers, students, researchers and the general public, who for the first time will have easy access to an archive of cultural and technological significance to the UK.

David Hay, Head of Heritage at BT Group, said: "BT's archive documents over a century of the achievements of British telecommunications engineers and scientists in pushing the boundaries of communications technology. I'm constantly fascinated by the photographs and documents in the archive- it's fantastic that the public can now enjoy it so easily, using our technology and networks".

Chris Mumby, Head of Commercial Delivery at The National Archives said: 'Our renowned expertise in creating and preserving digitised records ensures that this important collection is accessible to more people now and in the future.'

Professor Neil Forbes, Director of Research at Coventry University, said:

“It is a great pleasure to be able to launch the BT digital archives. Teams of experts from across the partners involved have worked together to produce an extraordinarily rich and important online archive. It’s a magnificent achievement.”

Paola Marchionni, programme manager, Jisc said: “We’re very proud at

Jisc to have funded the digitisation of this internationally recognised archive. The strength of this project lies in a partnership that goes beyond the higher education sector and which has made openly available 100,000s of digital resources for just anybody to enjoy. At the same time, the academic team has produced fascinating case studies which show how digitised archival material can be used to explore new avenues both in research and teaching in a wide range of subjects, from design to linguistic and cultural studies.”

For further information, please contact The National Archives Press Office on 0208 392 5277 or press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

About The National Archives

For the record, for good...The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archive of the UK government and England and Wales, we look after and make available to the public a collection of historical records dating back over 1,000 years, including records as diverse as Domesday Book and MI5 files.

Our 21st-century role is to collect and secure the future of the record, both digital and physical, to preserve it for generations to come, and to make it as accessible as possible. We do this by devising technological solutions to ensure the long-term survival of public records and working to widen access to our collection. The National Archives also advises on information management across government, publishes all UK legislation, manages Crown copyright and leads the archive sector. We work to promote and improve access to public sector information and its re-use.

Follow the press office on Twitter [@TNApressofficer](https://twitter.com/TNApressofficer) and for general news [@UkNatArchives](https://twitter.com/UkNatArchives).

About BT

BT is one of the world's leading providers of communications services and solutions, serving customers in more than 170 countries. Its principal activities include the provision of networked IT services globally; local, national and international telecommunications services to its customers for use at home, at work and on the move; broadband and internet products and services and converged fixed/mobile products and services. BT consists principally of four lines of business: BT Global Services, BT Retail, BT Wholesale and Openreach.

In the year ended 31 March 2013, BT Group's revenue was £18,017m with profit before taxation of £2,501m.

British Telecommunications plc (BT) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of BT Group plc and encompasses virtually all businesses and assets of the BT Group. BT Group plc is listed on stock exchanges in London and New York.

For more information, visit www.btplc.com

About BT Heritage

BT's commitment to its heritage is published in its Heritage Policy (www.bt.com/archives) adopted in 2004. BT is the only major company to have made such a public commitment to safeguard its heritage on behalf of the nation.

BT continues to fulfil this long-standing commitment to preserve and make accessible Britain's rich telecommunications history, still being made today.

About Coventry University

Coventry University is a modern, forward-looking university whose roots can be traced back to 1843 to the Coventry College of Design. With both a proud tradition as a provider of high quality education and a focus on multidisciplinary applied research, the University has established an academic presence regionally, nationally and across the world.

Through its links with leading-edge organisations and its longstanding culture of business support, the institution has earned a strong reputation for enterprise and innovation which sees it work with more SMEs each year than any other university, and helped it to secure the Times Higher Education 'Entrepreneurial University of the Year' award in 2011. Find out more at www.coventry.ac.uk.

About Jisc

Jisc offers digital services for UK education and research, owned by the Association of Colleges (AoC), GuildHE and Universities UK (UUK). The charity enables people in higher education, further education and skills in the UK to perform at the forefront of international practice by exploiting fully the possibilities of modern, digital empowerment, content and connectivity.

Jisc has been at the forefront of the practical application of technology in schools, colleges and universities for over two decades. We've earned a reputation as a trusted partner for the education and research sectors and today we combine the latest in digital thinking, network and IT services with access to content and resource procurement to deliver new and better ways of working for all customers to achieve operational advantage.

Find out more at www.jisc.ac.uk