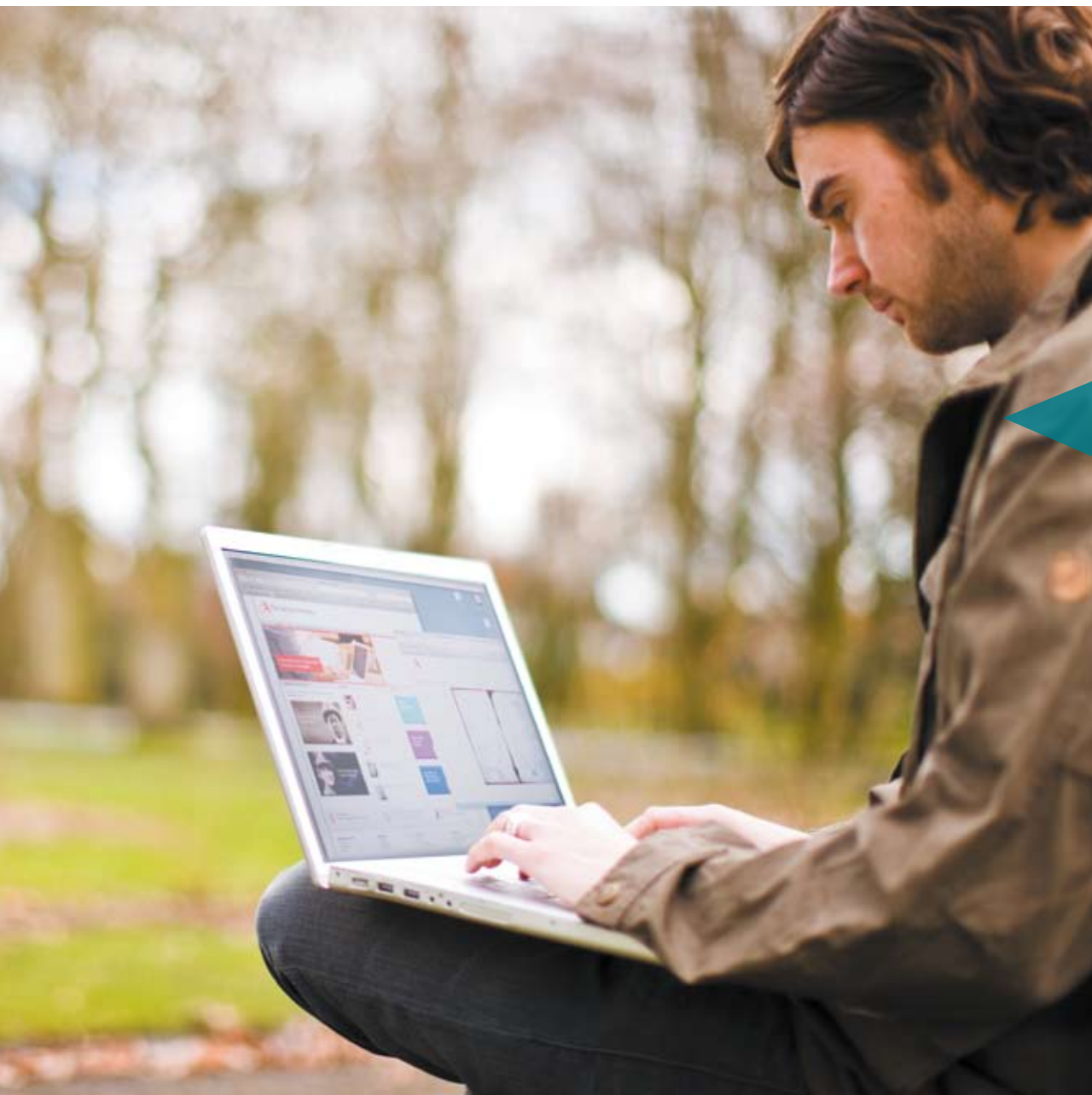




The National Archives



Embracing the  
future, preserving  
our past



*“We’re facing greater challenges than ever before, but we are confident that we have the skills, creativity and dedication to meet them.”*

Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive,  
The National Archives





## Information pioneers

The National Archives is a government department, an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice and is the official archive for the UK government. Information is the currency of the modern world and we act as guardians of government's information – the vital element at the heart of all its activities. We are experts in information creation, care and use.

We are the custodians of one of the largest archive collections in the world, dating back over 1,000 years. From Domesday Book to digital files and databases, we preserve ten million public records, making them accessible to all – our nation's story can be read through the documents and artefacts we hold. We are also a sector leader for local archive services across the country, working with and supporting archives nationwide to preserve the histories of countless communities, companies and individuals.

But our role in preserving pieces of the past is only part of the story.

### Public trust

Excellent information management and the ability to harness knowledge to good effect are skills that government increasingly depends upon. These skills ultimately allow better risk management and the delivery of more effective public services, coupled with increased trust in government's capability and accountability.

We are knowledge and information management pioneers. We support and guide government in building its capability in information management and we set standards for, and encourage the re-use of, public sector information. We also publish the vital information that underpins government's core day-to-day business, including legislation and key reports such as the Budget.

We are helping the public sector transform the way it uses and keeps information. As well as supporting effective government today, this will in turn ensure that the public record remains available for generations to come.



### Making a difference

Archives serve as our nation's memory, and offer a rich source of history to help individuals contextualise their modern-day experiences. Our support and leadership help local archives across the country to create even better services and find new, exciting ways to promote access to their collections.

Our work can touch the life of every person throughout our nation and thousands more worldwide, often without them even being aware of it. The direct access we provide to an unparalleled collection of historical resources inspires hundreds of news stories, feature articles and books every year. We work with multi-national film crews and our collections inform prime-time television viewing as well as countless documentaries and educational broadcasts.

We offer unrivalled research resources to individuals online and on site at Kew – not only to those whose professional lives revolve around historical research, but also to increasing numbers of enthusiasts committed to uncovering local or family history. We are dedicated to providing the services that our government, archival and public customers need, and we continually shape our ideas, our plans and our organisation in response to their requirements. We are based at three

sites – one in Kew, one in central London and one in Norwich. Together we form a world centre of expertise in historical and archival skills and in information management.

### Digital revolution

Effective government depends on accurate, accessible information. In recent years, the digital revolution has transformed the way that government works. Information is now expressed through an explosion of different media types, from formal electronic documents to emails, blogs and wikis.

Our challenge is to help government ensure that the information essential for day-to-day business and for tomorrow's historians stays accessible and useable for as long as it is needed.

### Accepting the challenge

This is a challenge that we can't ignore and it is crucial that we tackle the issues raised by the onset of the digital age. Our response is a five-year vision, one that is designed to meet the needs of all our different customers:

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



## Making it happen

This year our work to make our vision reality falls into five categories:

- ▶ Drive the shift to online services
- ▶ Make sure government knows what information it must keep, and keeps it
- ▶ Ensure government has long-term access to business-critical information through web and digital continuity
- ▶ Build excellence in our services by innovating and driving efficiency in all we do
- ▶ Deploy the right people, skills and technology to deliver our vision

In the following pages you can discover why these priorities are so important to us and find examples of some of our recent work designed to meet the challenges of the digital age.

**These are exciting times.**

# Online world of opportunity

► **Strategic priority:** *drive the shift to online services*

More and more, our customers expect to be able to access our services online. Over 170 documents were downloaded for every one original document seen by a visitor to our reading rooms in 2007-08, and the web is now the first choice for the majority of researchers.

We are changing with the times, in response to our customers' needs and preferences. We have already built up an award-winning web presence, but are now placing an even greater emphasis on web services. We can use new online technologies to improve access to our collections for researchers worldwide and make public sector information easier to identify and use than ever before.

This is a world of instant access to information, keyword-searching and personalisation. We have so many different audiences, with widely differing characteristics and preferences. To fulfil our customers' expectations we are concentrating on providing services tailored to their particular needs. Ours is a proactive approach: continually researching and planning so that we can take full advantage of the latest ideas and developments.

We are building a more interactive experience, offering a range of different resources and approaches. We will continue to enhance our online research guidance, podcasts, exhibitions and teaching aids to enrich our customers' study of historical records, and develop our guidance, assessment tools and resources for government and the archive sector. Our web services will also continue to promote the effective re-use of public sector information.

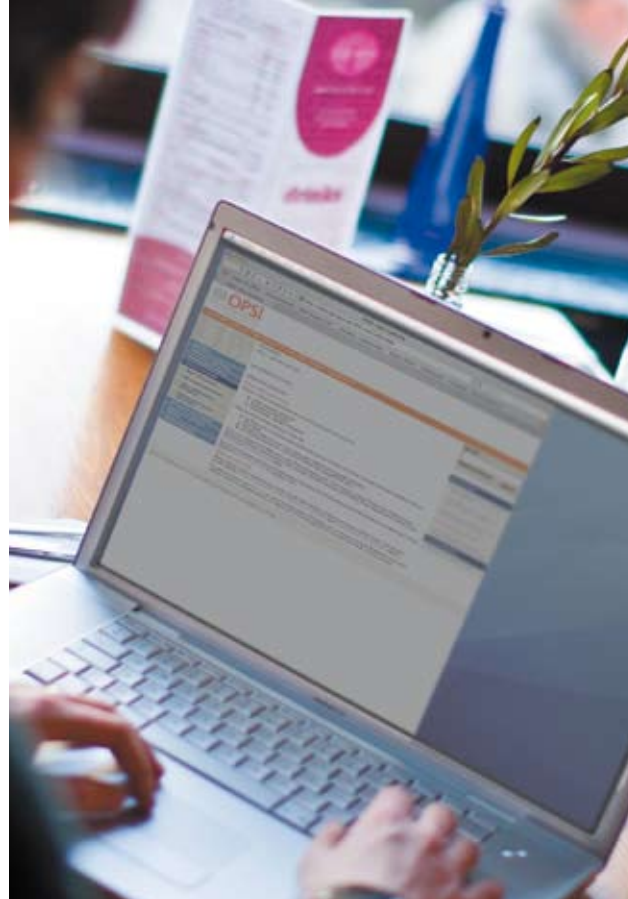
We are creating new web tools, designed to meet specific needs. This will include refining the online access to UK legislation we provide, to create a more intuitive and customer-friendly service. We are also developing online guides for history enthusiasts, introducing a range of different options to suit varying levels of experience and skills.

Engaging with all our different customers will continue to be at the heart of our online services – soliciting customers' feedback and building it into our plans and projects, and finding new ways for experts and enthusiasts across the world to share their knowledge with us and our audiences.

An aerial photograph of an aircraft carrier's deck, showing the runway and various structures. A teal callout box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

## Unparalleled access to modern history

Our Cabinet Papers 1915-1978 web collection gives vivid insights into some of the most momentous government decisions of the twentieth century, through World Wars, oil crises, stock market crashes and the creation of the welfare state. Funded by the JISC digitisation programme, this collection provides free, easy online access to over half a million pages of key government papers, along with ground-breaking interactive teaching aids and special resources for school and university students.



### ► Helping businesses use public sector information

We are making it easier for companies and individuals to build new businesses and services based on information produced by central and local government, Parliament and other public sector organisations. Obtaining one of our Click-Use Licences online is quick and easy, and enables the practical re-use of a huge range of information, including UK legislation, government research reports, policy documents, statistics and survey data.

### ► UFO investigations online

In 2008, a new online resource created by The National Archives sparked a wave of news stories worldwide. It showcases recently-released Ministry of Defence files detailing investigations into sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects between 1979 and 1993. We used this resource to communicate with UK and international media, inspiring nearly 300 pieces of media coverage. These stories led to widespread public interest and over 1.3 million downloads from the collection's homepage within four days of the site being launched.

### ► Community histories revealed

Our interactive online resource, 'Your Archives', allows enthusiasts worldwide to share insights into the records in our collections and other archives, and is built using the technology behind web phenomenon Wikipedia. We are now incorporating Victorian UK census information, creating unique historical street indexes featuring local businesses, pubs, hospitals, schools and workhouses. Contributors will be able to share detailed views of districts and communities, incorporating their own research and links to other resources.

# Information in a changing world

► **Strategic priority:** *make sure government knows what information to keep, and keeps it*

Government has systems and strategies in place to ensure that important pieces of information are identified and kept. These systems have built up gradually over time, but they must evolve to keep pace with technological advances. New media formats and approaches are continually emerging, and the volume of information being generated is expanding exponentially.

New working practices demand a radically different approach to identifying what to keep. The potential significance of digital documents has to be recognised at an early stage if they are to be safely stored and kept for further use and future reference.

There are many reasons why information could have long-term value, all of which need to be taken into account when deciding what to keep. Some information must be kept to comply with legislation. Some may be relevant to government's ongoing business activities, or it could be re-used by other government departments, the public, community groups or even commercial enterprises. Keeping the right information helps ensure accountability and informs future historical research.

We work closely with government bodies of all kinds – including departments, agencies and other organisations – to ensure that key information is identified and remains accessible. To meet the demands of the digital information age, we must build on this partnership to help government develop a new approach to reviewing information and establishing criteria for selecting what to keep. We will create a framework to help government manage information even more effectively, ensuring it has the right tools and processes for creating, categorising and storing key documents.

This undertaking is a logical extension of our traditional responsibilities, but it nevertheless requires a new, carefully-planned approach. New technologies demand new ways of thinking and changes in the ways that information is reviewed and categorised. There are challenges to overcome, but there is also potential for enriching the public record for future generations. This is a critical enterprise that will have a real impact not only across government – to make it more effective, efficient and accountable – but also on the archives and historians of the future.

## Telling the story of MI5

The Security Service – popularly known as MI5 – is 100 years old in 2009, and has a long-standing commitment to contributing historical files to our collection. We work with the Service to establish effective criteria for selecting historical documents for transfer to The National Archives (subject to considerations of national security). We publish the criteria by which government records are selected for transfer on our website, and visitors can read and comment on the guidance by which records are chosen. We hold two press events each year relating to the release of records by the Security Service, and these files are of huge interest to the media and the public.



### ► Studying climate change through history

We are helping the Met Office and international scientists study climate change using historical ships' logs from our archives. Royal Navy ships recorded weather conditions during every voyage from the 1690s onwards. Digitising and transcribing the logs allows climatologists to use this data in ways its creators could never have foreseen, studying weather patterns unaffected by industrialisation or the release of greenhouse gases. Our collections incorporate log books from numerous expeditions, including Charles Darwin's ship *HMS Beagle* and James Cook's explorations of the Pacific.

### ► Preparing for 2012

Those involved in the London 2012 Olympics, Paralympic Games, and the associated Cultural Olympiad range from national institutions and bodies to local community groups. Our goal is to ensure that records of the decisions and preparations in the years leading up to the event, as well as the event itself, are captured for future generations. We are building on established links with local and central government, archival and cultural institutions and creating new relationships with sporting bodies, broadcasters and other key players.

### ► Recognising the significance of information

The long-term value of a document can be hard to gauge at the point of creation. Among the treasures in our historical collections are the captains' log books from *HMS Bounty* and *HMS Victory*, along with the *Victory's* 'muster roll' – a register of all the crewmembers, showing their different countries of origin. These were all absolutely standard, everyday working documents. Their creators could never have dreamed the extraordinary value they would have to future historians.





## Safeguarding government's information assets

► **Strategic priority:** *ensure government has long-term access to business-critical information through web and digital continuity*

How do we make sure that government can preserve its digital information? It is much more complex and vulnerable than traditional paper documents. Hardware can degrade, software and file formats become obsolete and indexing can be lost or corrupted. Digital information requires new processes and practices to keep it complete, available and useable over time. Unless action is taken, there is a risk that digital information vital for the everyday business of government, or that will have significant future historical value, could be lost forever.

Our responsibility is to help government develop the tools, processes and culture necessary for managing business-critical information and keeping it accessible. This is essential for effective government now – and it also makes it possible for us to preserve history for future generations.

Our Digital Continuity project is funded by 16 central government departments, and is working closely with them to identify the digital risks they face. Our goal is a shared service that ensures the continuity of digital information for today's

business and for the future. This service will provide guidance, tools, standards and innovative technology.

When digital records are no longer in active use, we are ready to receive and archive them using our own secure transfer system. We store the original version of each file, while creating and keeping an accessible copy that continually evolves as file formats change over time.

Government frequently uses websites to convey information to the public, and it is essential that links continue working as information is updated.

Our Web Continuity project ensures that links on central government sites remain active, even when the information they link to is no longer available on the live site. This project has developed guidance and tools to ensure users are automatically redirected to content captured in the UK Government Web Archive. We manage this archive, regularly taking copies of key government websites for future researchers. We also create designated web collections that showcase key national events or periods of significant change.



### ► Tracking the credit crunch

Economists and historians of the future will want access to government information published during the 'credit crunch' that began in 2008. We are gathering a series of website snapshots showing government's response to the developing international economic crisis to form part of the UK Government Web Archive. Our collection includes copies of 13 key public websites collected on a monthly basis, including the HM Treasury, Number 10 Downing Street and Bank of England sites.

### ► World-leading work on digital preservation

Understanding file formats is essential for maintaining long-term access to digital information. Each type of digital document has an identifying data 'signature'. Recognising a file's signature makes it possible to select appropriate viewing software, but defining signatures for different file formats can take weeks of detective work. We have created a unique system – setting the standard for digital preservation worldwide – combining a registry of file signatures with a custom-built tool that selects the best existing software application to read a file. We are now building on this success and working with other national archives to plan the next generation of format registry.

### ► Keeping digital files accessible online

In 1980 the British merchant ship *MV Derbyshire* was lost with all its crew during a typhoon in the South China Sea. The digital records from the 1997 public inquiry into the sinking of the ship include over 240 gigabytes of digital photographs, video footage and computer simulations. Our preservation techniques will ensure the survival of the inquiry files and create copies of key records in formats accessible from our website. This expertise will help government maintain access to complex digital information for the future.

## Greater efficiency through innovation

► **Strategic priority:** *build excellence in our services by innovating and driving efficiency in all we do*

Our services are inspired and shaped by the needs of our customers – as their expectations change, we change in response. Our plans are driven by our determination to provide excellent services while giving taxpayers the best possible value for money.

Efficient working practices are crucial. We continually investigate new ways to make our processes smarter and make savings, without detracting from the quality of our services. We are also committed to responsible, sustainable initiatives, embracing green ideas and reducing our carbon footprint.

Protecting the unique and priceless collections of records and artefacts held within our repositories requires very specific environmental conditions. However, embracing the latest technological advances can help us save both money and energy, without jeopardising our historical treasures, and we will continue to research strategies for reducing our environmental impact.

Cutting-edge technology offers us new ways to protect our historical collections, while making them ever more accessible. Digitising records reduces the need to handle historic documents, while improving and widening access to their contents. We are working to digitise our most popular records and make them available to researchers online through our own Documents Online service and through commercial licensing partnerships. We are also using display screens and computer training resources in our reading rooms to help researchers work more safely with original documents.

Our research into information theory, archival and historical fields and the science of conservation continually feeds into our public services. We will continue to take the lead in all aspects of information management and preservation, making sure that our customers and our collections benefit from the very best new ideas and approaches.

### Publishing the 1911 census online

We form licensing partnerships with commercial companies to make our most popular records available online. These partnerships make government records – such as the 1911 census – more widely accessible without requiring additional investment of public money. This census consists of millions of delicate, handwritten paper pages. With rigorous supervision and guidance from our expert staff, our external partner scanned, transcribed and published this extraordinary resource online – and the website handled over 11 million searches in the first week after it was launched.



### ► Climate control

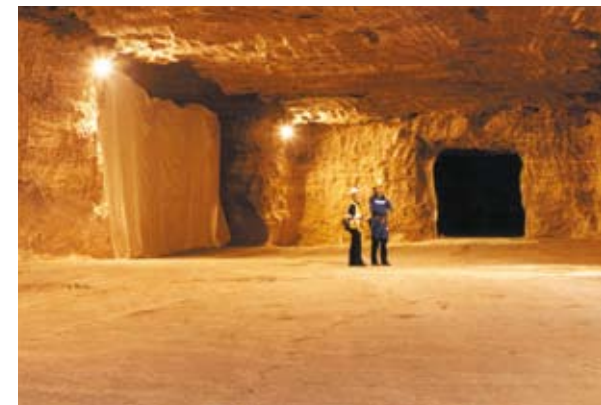
Preserving our historical collections requires very specific environmental conditions. Small changes can have significant consequences in a site containing 16 repositories and 180 kilometres of shelving. Researchers from the Centre for Sustainable Heritage at University College London are helping us build a sophisticated computer simulation of the site including room layouts, wall thicknesses, window locations, building materials, airflow and many other factors. This will allow us to experiment with strategies for increasing efficiency, while keeping our collections safe from harm.

### ► Making Kew greener

The ponds at our Kew site are a valuable resource for local wildlife, but it takes 82,000 litres to top up the water level by one inch. By using rainwater run-off from the roof, we reduce our reliance on mains water, support local biodiversity and make substantial savings. We also save money and energy at Kew by using voltage optimisers, which reduce the electrical current from 240 volts to 220 volts. Lighting and electrical equipment function as effectively but we use 10% less electricity.

### ► Ideal storage conditions underground

We keep our least-frequently consulted records in a 'Deep Store' facility in Cheshire, 500 feet below ground inside a working salt mine that naturally maintains a stable climate suitable for storing paper and parchment. Deep Store also houses some of our most popular documents, such as ships' passenger lists and medal records, which are now available online. This makes them more accessible, but reduces the need for physical contact, helping protect these records from damage and deterioration.





## Preserving the Spode archive

Our support has helped preserve the historic archive belonging to the famous Spode porcelain factory in Stoke-on-Trent. Until 2008, the records were cared for by an independent museum trust at the factory, but the redevelopment of the site put this collection at risk. We worked with the museum trustees to find a safe and publicly-accessible new home for the records at the Staffordshire Archive Service.

## Shaping up for the future

► *Strategic priority: deploy the right people, skills and technology to deliver our vision*

Good information management is a key element in effective government. At The National Archives, we are committed to maintaining and enhancing our historical and archival expertise. However, we must also continually develop new skills in all areas of information management – and our capability in working with new technologies and new ideas – if we are to meet the needs of government and the wider archive sector.

We support the Knowledge Council: a cross-departmental body leading on knowledge and information management (KIM) throughout government. It is helping to build the capability of those working with information by strengthening leadership, improving the way information is dealt with, and looking at the best technologies to meet our needs. It also supports the professional development of government KIM practitioners. KIM is now recognised as a key business function across government, with our Chief Executive as head of profession.

We are also building our capacity to support the UK archive sector. We already provide expert advice and resources to archives nationwide, but

we are now working with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and CyMAL in Wales to develop a new policy on archives. This will help publicly-funded archive services meet the changing needs of archive users, preserve and showcase their collections more effectively, and build more productive partnerships.

The quality of our services is only made possible by the dedication and professionalism of our staff, and their constant commitment to first-class customer care. We are working to further cultivate a positive, supportive staff culture that effectively develops individuals and maximises their potential.

We are continually planning for the future, researching new ideas, approaches and technologies, and identifying the skills we will need. As the ways people create and use information change, so too do the expectations and needs of government, the public and the wider archive sector. Our strategic priorities are a response to our customers' current requirements – but we will continue to evolve to keep pace with new challenges and the constantly-changing nature of public sector information.



### ► Sharing our expertise on site and online

We offer talks and advice designed to guide newcomers through the basics of using historical collections. We also offer specialist talks focusing on periods of history, different types of records or key historical figures. Meanwhile, our learning workshops for school pupils are inspiring the next generation of historians. Actors in costume bring opposing historical perspectives to life, for example setting a slave trader's views against those of an abolitionist. We use podcasts, videoconferencing and our 'virtual classroom' website to make our learning sessions accessible to history enthusiasts of all generations across the country, and even to students in other European countries and the USA.

### ► Breaking down barriers to re-using government information

In 2008, we hosted a 'barcamp' – an informal workshop, open to all – to explore how government can collect and assess online requests to re-use public sector information more effectively. Contributors included colleagues from other government departments, entrepreneurs experienced in launching business projects based on information created by public bodies, and web activists. One participant commented: 'No one in government IT will ever have done anything like this before.'

### ► Strengthening professional links

We host an online community for government KIM professionals to support knowledge-sharing and facilitate networks between those working in the disciplines that make up the KIM profession. It uses wiki technology so members can contribute, comment and collaborate on projects across departmental boundaries. It's an ideal forum for KIM specialists to ask questions, offer solutions and share expertise, experiences and ideas.



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**Page 6:** *Hawker Hurricane approaching escort carrier 1942*, catalogue reference INF 3/1258

**Page 7:** *Eastgate, Chester, 1878*, COPY 1/43 f.27

**Page 8:** *Louis Westrum*, catalogue reference KV 2/2249

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*We're extremely proud of the unique collections and resources that we hold and the services that we offer, which enrich the lives of millions.*

Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive,  
The National Archives

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CB/2009/01 – Embracing the future  
April 2009

