



The National Archives

**Press release**

**1 March 2010**

### **Surveying the country's religious heritage**

The first ever comprehensive survey of religious archives has begun, with questionnaires going to temples and Hindu organisations across the country. The Society of Archivists and The National Archives have come together in support of an initiative by the Religious Archives Group to find out the extent and nature of the country's religious heritage and how it is cared for.

The United Kingdom has a rich and diverse religious background, which constitutes an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage. This survey looks to build an overall picture of the historical records of religious institutions, develop a better understanding of the religious archives sector as a whole, and encourage best practice where appropriate.

Clive Field, President of the Religious Archives Group and chair of the survey steering committee, added: "This innovative survey, which has been conceived for the 'common good', will help to celebrate the far-reaching contribution which the faith communities have made, and continue to make, to our national life."

Claire Muller, Resource Discovery Officer for the survey, commented: "As this is the first attempt at a comprehensive overview of religious archives in the UK, it is vital that as many institutions as possible take part. By creating a better knowledge of their existence and location, this survey will assist creators and owners to realise the full potential of their historical records and help to identify opportunities for the future."

The survey, funded by the Pilgrim Trust, will be conducted in stages- over the coming months, questionnaires will be sent to institutions across the religious spectrum. The results will be used to enrich the online National Register of Archives, managed by The National Archives.

**- Ends -**

**For further information, please contact:**

Angela Owusu  
The National Archives  
T: 020 8392 5237  
[press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### **About the Society of Archivists**

The Society of Archivists, [www.archives.org.uk](http://www.archives.org.uk), has been the principal professional body in the UK and Ireland for Archivists, Records Managers and Archive Conservators since 1947.

It aims to foster the care and preservation of archives in the public interest and to promote the better administration of archive repositories, to advance the professional education and training of Archivists, Archive Conservators and Records Managers and those engaged in related activities and to commission and support research into the creation, use, administration and conservation of archives and the development of new techniques and the publication of the useful results of such research.

The Society has 2,200 individual and institutional members across the public, private and third sectors in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

### **About the Religious Archives Group (RAG)**

The Religious Archives Group (RAG) was founded in 1989 as an informal group of archivists, librarians and others with an interest in the collection, management and use of archives related to the various faith communities in the UK. It has one hundred institutional and personal members, mostly based in universities and faith communities. RAG's activities include an annual full-day conference, an online discussion list and periodic newsletters. Besides this survey, current strategic priorities are the development of <http://rylibweb.web.its.manchester.ac.uk/rag2/index.html>, the RAG website, into a portal for religious archives, and the promotion of Nonconformist archives in connection with the 350th anniversary in 2012 of the formal commencement of Nonconformity.

### **About The National Archives**

The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry for Justice and is at the heart of government information policy. The National Archives is the UK government's official archive, containing 1,000 years of history. It is at the forefront of developing archival services for the public and plays a key role in leading and advising the archives sector. It has a dedicated Private Archives Team which focuses on support for archives in the wider community beyond the public sector. The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk)

### **About the National Register of Archives**

The National Register of Archives is the central collecting point for information regarding the nature and location of manuscripts relating to British history beyond The National Archives. It currently consists of over 44,000 unpublished lists and catalogues and now has over 100,000 links from its online indexes to archival networks and repositories' own electronic catalogues. The Register has a wealth of information about the records of religious institutions and the papers of prominent members of some faiths within the UK, but there remain major gaps and it does not fully reflect the diversity of the religious landscape today.

### **About The Pilgrim Trust**

The Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 by the wealthy American philanthropist Edward Stephen Harkness. It was Harkness's wish that his gift be given in grants for some of Britain's 'more urgent needs' and to 'promote her future well-being'. The first Trustees decided that the Trust should assist with social welfare projects, preservation (of buildings and countryside) and the promotion of art and learning. This has remained the focus of The Pilgrim Trust.