

## ***Community Spirit* Set To Unlock A Treasure Trove Of North West History**

### **Major project launched to get 1000's of local records electronically catalogued and searchable online**

September will see the start of an exciting new project by **MLA North West** (Museums, Libraries & Archives North West) and partners to convert 1000's of pages of archive catalogues into an electronic form for the very first time.

The project will involve converting over 23,000 pages of archival catalogues from around the north west and will include church, parish and local government archives - the type of records most popular with people researching their family trees. Genealogy research is increasingly popular in the region and nearly 80% of all current archive users in the north west are family historians. The region also has the highest percentage of the population using archives in the UK.

One of the reasons for the huge growth in family history research has been increasing access to historical information via the internet. When the 1901 census was put online nearly 30 million people tried to access it on the first day.

The *Community Spirit* data will be available online next year as part of the national *Access to Archives* project (A2A). The website - [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk) - already holds details of over 7 million documents from over 350 different archives from around the country with records dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

By entering keywords, or using simple drop down menus, the site can quickly search all the online records and the results include a description of the documents available together with a reference number and the name of where the original document resides. If you are then interested in studying a particular record first hand you then simply click through to get full contact details for the relevant repository.

*Community Spirit* is MLA North West's third A2A project having already successfully completed *Mills, Mansions & Cornershops* (records of family, estate and business

archives) and *Our Mutual Friends in the North* (records from co-operative and friendly societies, political parties and cultural societies). Both of these have already been extremely popular with the public and the north west is now the third most popular region for archive searches in the UK.

Beyond just records of baptisms, burials and marriages, *Community Spirit* will also help unlock a diverse and fascinating array of other documents including local government records relating to evacuation, the blitz and the homeguard.

These will join some of the more unusual records from previous MLA North West projects such as the archives of the *Most Honourable and Facetious Society of Ugly Faces* 1743-1757 (a social club for less attractive individuals in Liverpool) and the archive of Kendal's K Shoemakers dating back to 1842.

Clare Connor, Chief Executive of MLA North West, said of *Community Spirit*: *"The enthusiastic response we received after completing the previous archive projects indicates that the public are increasingly interested in family and local history. The next step is to get the north west's thousands of church and parish records catalogued and online. Once completed, Community Spirit will enable anyone to quickly locate a specific document with just a few clicks of a mouse and will help bring the region's history alive."*

Janice Tullock, MLA North West's archive development officer added: *"It's a huge task, but we're confident that by 2005 we will have successfully converted 23,000 pages of archival catalogues and this will then offer everyone the chance to begin researching family trees and other aspects of local history using the A2A database. Many people who want to use local archives have found the paper-based indexing complicated and off-putting, but projects like this are making the process much more accessible."*

The *Community Spirit* project team will be based at *The Great Manchester County Record Office* and will work in partnership with 17 repositories across the north west. The project is supported by MLA North West, MLA and the North West Regional Archive Council together with £50,000 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**ENDS**

**Clare Connor and Janice Tullock are available for interview. For more information on MLA North West please contact Richard Bond or Lorna Skingley at Spin Media Public Relations on 0161 236 9909. Email [richard@spinmedia.co.uk](mailto:richard@spinmedia.co.uk)**

### **Notes To Editors**

Community Spirit partners include:

Lancashire Record Office

Cumbria Archives Service

Whitehaven

Oldham Local Studies and Archives

Bolton Archives and Local Studies

Wigan Archives

Manchester Archives and Local Studies

Rochdale Archives and Local Studies

Bury Archives

Stockport Archives

Cheshire and Chester Archives and

Local Studies

Wirral Archives

### **About MLA North West**

- MLA North West is committed to developing accessible, inclusive collections and services that provide lifelong learning, inspiration and enjoyment for all
- MLA North West provides innovative services and strategic leadership for the region's 160 museums, 40 major archives and 500 libraries
- 46 million people across the North West access these resources
- MLA North West aim is to maximise the contribution this sector makes to the North West's cultural, educational and economic prosperity
- MLA North West is one of 9 regional agencies in the UK who are tasked with the promotion and development of the sector nationwide.

### **About The Sector**

#### **Archives:**

- In the last 10 years, the number of people using historic archives has doubled
- Nearly 30 million people searched the 1901 Census on the first day it was made available online.
- The North West has the highest percentage of the population using archives of any region.
- In 2003/4 31% more people made enquiries to archives in the North West than in the previous year.

#### **Museums:**

- Four out of the top 5 tourist attractions in the UK are museums
- More people visit museums in a year than attend music concerts or sporting events
- 25% of all museum visitors are children

#### **Libraries:**

- 60% of the UK population have a library card
- Between 2002 and 2003, library visits rose by almost 5 million
- Libraries in the UK now have over 30,000 computer terminals for public use and deliver over 50 million hours of free internet access