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Dear Chief Librarian,

I am writing to let you know about the Domesday Project - the creation of a new electronic Domesday Book in 1986.

As you may already have heard, the Domesday Project is a national venture co-ordinated by the BBC celebrating the 900th anniversary of the completion of the original Domesday Book. BBC Television is not only producing a major documentary series, tracing the evolution of Britain over the past 900 years, but is also compiling and publishing a new Domesday Book, a contemporary portrait of Britain on interactive video disc. At the heart of the new Domesday Book will be a 'People's Database' of information generated by local people about their own area.

This Summer, schools and community groups all over the country will be taking part. Their research for the Domesday Project will involve studying a four by three kilometre area of land and describing what local people think is important about this area. They will also be providing four 35mm slide photographs, studying land use and identifying specified amenities such as museums, public transport and schools. I must point out that the People's Database should be a record of life today rather than an historical analysis of the country.

People taking part in the project will, I am sure, have recourse to their local libraries for detailed information. They will need to study large scale maps and also reference books which cover their allocated block. I would be grateful therefore if you could tell appropriate staff about the Project so that they can help participants in their area.

The enclosed press pack contains further details about the Domesday Project.

I look forward to working with you and your colleagues and will be pleased to answer any queries you may have.

Yours sincerely,

A. S. Wood

(Amanda Wood),
Information Officer.

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THE DOMESDAY PROJECT

Headlines

The Domesday Project is:

- thought to be the largest interactive videodisc project in the world
- the first national interactive videodisc project in Britain
- probably the first comprehensive survey of a nation ever attempted by a non-governmental organisation
- the first opportunity for schools throughout Britain to take part in a nation-wide project using their recently-acquired microcomputers
- the inspiration for a new generation of videodisc player incorporating beyond-the-state-of-the-art technology
- among the major milestones in the history of the BBC in terms of co-operation between individuals and departments from all over the Corporation
- the next phase in the BBC's commitment to inform and educate the British public about new communication and information technologies
- an ambitious and exciting opportunity for British people to tell us and each other about how they view themselves and their local environments in the last quarter of the twentieth century
- a source of information, education and entertainment for many years to come
- a dramatic but logical extension of the BBC's role as a public service broadcasting organisation

THE DOWESDAY PROJECT

Introduction

Final approval has now been given by Bill Cotton, Managing Director of BBC Television, for an important new BBC project - the creation of a new Domesday Book on interactive videodisc.

1986 will be the 900th anniversary of the completion of the original Domesday Book and BBC TV Network Features will be producing a major six-part documentary series to mark the occasion. The idea for a new Domesday Book came from Peter Armstrong, Executive Producer of the series, and Editor of the Domesday Project, who said, "Whereas the series will approach the subject from a historical point of view, discussing how Britain has evolved over the last 900 years, the intention of the Domesday videodisc project is to provide a comprehensive image of Britain in the 1980s - a contemporary snapshot."

The Domesday Project is thought to be the largest and most ambitious videodisc project ever to be undertaken anywhere in the world. Much of the data on the discs will be collected in the course of 1985 by over 10,000 volunteer schools and other organisations who will produce a 'peoples database' of information on local communities - prepared by the communities themselves. Further information on the discs will be collated from national sources. In total the two Domesday Discs will hold sufficient data for two million pages of information plus 20,000 Ordnance Survey maps and nearly 150,000 pictures from photographs also provided by the schools and other collecting local data, together with the results of a national photographic competition in which everybody will be invited to take part, and the product of research among picture collections and archives.

This massive assembly of information - maps, pictures, facts and text, roughly the equivalent of two whole sets of the Encyclopaedia Britannica - will be accessed by means of a microcomputer linked to a new kind of videodisc player on which the Domesday Disc will be played. The highly successful BBC Microcomputer will be ideal for the Domesday system and a new interactive videodisc player will be produced in co-operation with Philips Electronics Ltd, which can store computer data alongside television pictures and will be available under the BBC brand name.

The Domesday Project is a corporate BBC venture of unprecedented scale. It involves not only BBC TV Network Features but BBC Enterprises Ltd. who will be marketing the discs; Educational Broadcasting who will manage the schools project and provide broadcast support on schools TV and radio; BBC Data, the Corporation's network of in-house information resources, who will provide information-management expertise; the Open University Production Centre; BBC Graphics, Computer Services; Broadcasting Research and BBC Engineering & Research Division, who are advising on the technical aspects of a project which is likely to put the BBC at the leading edge of videodisc technology.

A wide range of external organisations are also participating, with practical support being provided by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and a number of leading Universities including those of Essex, of Newcastle upon Tyne and Birkbeck College, London University. Also involved are the Microelectronics in Education Programme, the Ordnance Surveys of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Local Education Authorities everywhere.

The project will require no money from licence fees. Funding is jointly by Philips Electronics and the Department of Trade and Industry, who are contributing to the Domesday Project as part of their overall commitment to developing information technology and interactive video in particular, together with BBC Enterprises Ltd., who are re-employing revenue from the sale of BBC Micros and associated materials. Acorn Computers, the BBC's established partners in the Computer Literacy Project, will also be providing all the interfacing required to link the microcomputer to the new player plus the software for the user to retrieve, manipulate and display all the Domesday data.

All aspects of the project will be guided by advisory committees representing the country's leading experts, including an Editorial Board advising on the selection of data compiled for the discs; a software committee devising new operating systems and software standards, technical groups and an educational committee advising on the schools' activities.

The Domesday Project will be the first opportunity for schools throughout Britain to use their recently acquired microcomputers in an important national project. Early in 1985 all schools volunteering to participate will receive a floppy disc or cassette for their micros on which will be all the software they need to compile data on a map-area which they will be responsible. In addition to some simple factual information, the bulk of the material generated by the school will be an average of sixteen screen-pages of free-form text describing what the local community itself feels is relevant and interesting about their own area.

It is anticipated that the major market for the Domesday Discs and the new BBC Videodisc Player will be in the educational and institutional sector where they will be of tremendous value for general reference and as a resource for curricular use in a wide range of subjects. This new, exciting medium will also be great fun to use!

The Domesday Project will help to establish interactive videodiscs as essential educational and information-handling tools in Britain and may well be the first in a continuing series of BBC interactive videodiscs.

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The Domesday Discs

In its planned final form the Domesday Disc package will consist of two optically-recorded videodiscs.

The first Domesday Disc will consist of information about Britain on a local basis: Ordnance Survey maps plus the local data, text and pictures compiled by volunteer schools and other community organisations to reflect what local people feel is important and relevant about their own area. Quite apart from the factual content, this "peoples database" will provide fascinating insights into the way people in various areas of Britain view themselves.

The second Domesday Disc will contain information from major national data sources and will include information on natural resources, transport, population statistics, demographic data, social activities, arts & crafts, education, entertainment, health, flora, fauna, etc. Also included will be a comprehensive survey of land-cover detailing the percentage of the area of each kilometre-square of the country devoted to a range of categories such as grassland, arable, housing, etc. Material will also be culled from the BBC's own internal information resources in BBC Data and BBC Broadcasting Research. Finally this disc will contain approximately 40,000 pictures on a wide range of topics from museums, archives, picture agencies including the BBC's own Hulton Picture Library, and also from the general public: the results of a national photographic contest.

The Domesday Discs will also contain all the indexes and microcomputer software to enable users to retrieve, combine, compare and present the Domesday material in vivid and exciting displays on the monitor screen.

In addition to the two Domesday Discs, it is hoped a further interactive videodisc will be supplied, giving on one side a general introduction to the concept of the medium of interactive video and its potential. On the other side will be an interactive User's Guide to the Domesday Discs themselves.

THE DOMESDAY PROJECT

The Schools Project

By the end of this month every school in the country will have received an invitation to take part in the Domesday Project. Their role will be to assist in the creation of a "people's database" of local information which will be a major part of this exciting national venture.

Over ten thousand schools are expected to accept the invitation and, in discussion with their Local Education Authorities, each will be assigned a local map area (on average an area 4Ks x 3Ks) for which to compile a contemporary record. This activity will be incorporated into the school's mainstream curriculum, supplementing a variety of subjects with interesting and informative project work. In support of this, each school will be supplied with a kit containing all they need. This will include full written instructions, maps and map references, a disc or cassette for the school micro and briefing/resource materials for teachers, compiled under the guidance of a committee of education experts, and designed to help teachers explore the full educational value of the school's participation in this national effort.

The information compiled by each school will consist principally of about sixteen screen-pages of free-form text about their map area, reflecting what people in the local community think is relevant and interesting about the area. In support of this material the school will take a small number of 35mm slides to illustrate important features of the area and its life, and also provide a some simple statistical data.

All the information other than the photographs will be assembled on the schools' microcomputers. The Domesday Project is thought to be the first substantial opportunity for schools to use their micros in a national educational project. The Microelectronics in Education Programme and the Scottish Microelectronics Development Program will be closely involved in collating all the schools' material prior to forwarding to the Domesday Project team at the BBC.

The Schools Project will be carried out during the Summer term of 1985 and to coincide with this activity, BBC schools TV and Radio will provide substantial support, broadcasting information and advice to schools on how to derive most benefit from the project.

THE DONESDAY PROJECT

The National Data

In addition to the local data compiled specially for the project by volunteer schools, the Donesday Discs will also contain as much national data as possible, drawn from existing resources and adapted to a form suitable for the medium of interactive video.

The identification and selection of this data will be guided by an Editorial Board of professional researchers, including, among others, representatives of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Birkbeck College of London University and the University of Essex, which is also the home of the National Data Archive.

The National Data Archive contains most of the major national surveys in computer-readable form and is charged with the responsibility of making this data available to researchers. Their holdings include census data, the General Household Survey, etc. Initial discussions with the originators of this material, such as the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, indicates that they are enthusiastic for appropriate data to be included on the Donesday Discs.

Further national data will be obtained from sources yet to be explored and from within the BBC itself. For example, BBC Broadcasting Research have recently completed a massive survey of the way in which people all over the UK spend their time throughout each day. The numerical results of this investigation - over 2,000 tables, published by BBC Data Publications as "Daily Life in the 1980s" - is planned to be included on the discs.

There will be 40,000 "national" pictures on the Donesday Discs, too, i.e. additional to the many thousands of "local" pictures compiled in the schools project. These will be carefully researched in specialist archives and picture libraries such as the BBC's own Multon Picture Library and cover those aspects of our national life best captured in pictures - wildlife, fashion, leisure, family life, etc.

Finally, as much data as possible will be capable of presentation as overlays to Ordnance Survey maps; the Ordnance Surveys of both Great Britain and Northern Ireland are in support of the project. It is planned to include maps, pictures and data-presentations at three levels: Level 1 will be the whole country; Level 2 will probably be blocks of 40Ks x 30Ks and Level 3 will be very local blocks of 4Ks x 3Ks.

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Who will use the Domesday Discs?

Imagine it is the Autumn of 1986. In front of you is a BBC Micro with a colour monitor all connected to a BBC Interactive Videodisc Player loaded with a Domesday Disc. You begin with an Ordnance Survey map of the whole United Kingdom. You call up boundaries of counties, administrative areas and flip from maps to tables of information to pictures of the country as a whole and its major areas. You convert much of the data into multicoloured overlays to the map: green-belt areas, unemployment black-spots, and the colour of voting in the last election. Now you can move a cursor on the screen to any part of the country and you can zoom in to a larger-scale map of about 40Ks x 30Ks. A whole new set of facts, figures and pictures become available to you, all just relating to the local area of interest. Another zoom-in takes you down to only 4Ks x 3Ks. Churches and farms become distinguishable at this level and there will be pictures and copious information, even though you are looking at less than a twenty-thousandth of the UK. Indeed you can read ten or twenty pages of guidance to this small area - written by people who live nearby and know it well.

This is what the Domesday Project will achieve.

Even now we are able to identify many areas of application for this immensely powerful information resource.

For example, regional conferences with teachers and Local Authorities have confirmed the educational value of the Domesday Discs and they are working with the project team on compiling much of the data in a nationwide schools project. In addition to curricular use of the discs in teaching a wide range of subjects, the colour and variety of the new system are expected to stimulate many extra-curricular activities as well.

Many people from the UK's highly active community of information professionals are also excited by the possibilities of the Domesday Project. Reference facilities in libraries, museums, research establishments, local government offices, etc., will be greatly enhanced by the incorporation of a Domesday system.

Domesday will attract considerable interest in commercial sectors, too. Marketing, planning, and research will all benefit greatly from both the national and local data on the Domesday Discs, particularly in small firms with very limited budgets for lengthy research among widespread and often obscure resources.

Nevertheless, whilst we already see more than enough possibilities for usage of the Domesday system to be convinced of its unprecedented value, the true excitement of the project is the expectation that in the hands of imaginative users the Domesday Discs will suggest applications beyond any of our current guesses!

THE DOMESDAY PROJECT

The Technological challenge

The past three years have seen a radical leap forward in the use of microcomputers in schools, in offices and in the home. Already we are seeing systems developing from rudimentary configurations with the addition of floppy disc drives, second processors and better monitors, with schools and other educational establishments in the forefront of these advances.

By 1986 we may expect the computing power at the typical micro user's fingertips to have outstripped most available forms of software, whether for education or for fun. In this context, the Domesday Discs will provide an exciting new kind of resource for the micro user, fuelling the further extended use of computers in education, libraries, public offices and elsewhere, for years to come.

The technological challenge of the Domesday Project is that whilst the BBC Micro is an ideal computer system with which to access the Domesday material, no standard operating system currently exists to control this new generation of interactive video, no off-the-shelf information-handling software package is capable of coping with the massive scale of Domesday and no videodisc player currently available can handle the proposed system of images and data on the same disc.

However, the ways to meet these challenges are known and Domesday has provided just the stimulus required to make the necessary development work in this area worthwhile.

Acorn Computers, manufacturers of the BBC Micro and the BBC's established partners in the Computer Literacy Project, are working with the Corporation once again, providing all the micro software support required by Domesday. In co-operation with a Software Committee representing the best software expertise in the country, Acorn will develop a new international standard operating system and protocols for handling interactive video. They will also develop the sophisticated package of programs required to retrieve, combine, compare and present Domesday material in vivid and exciting screen displays.

To meet the challenge of a new generation of videodisc player, the BBC has turned to the European manufacturer of videodisc players, Philips Electronics Ltd. In addition to co-funding the Domesday Project, Philips will design a radically new kind of videodisc player capable of handling the Domesday Discs. This player will be available in late-1986, including marketing under the "BBC" brand. It is expected that the BBC Videodisc Player will become the new accepted standard for educational and institutional use.

THE DOESDAY PROJECT

The Future of BBC Interactive Video

The unprecedented scope of the Doesday Project and its particular excitement give it the appearance of a "one-off" event. However, whilst it is unlikely quickly to be matched in scale, Doesday may well turn out to be simply the forerunner of a continuing series of interactive video titles from the BBC.

In the background to BBC Enterprises' work on the Doesday Project is a survey of other programme-related material suitable to adaptation in interactive form. It is likely that Natural History, Language-learning and Science will be fruitful areas, among many others, and the BBC has particular strengths in all of these. When the Doesday Discs are made available in late 1986 it is planned to have an initial catalogue ready outlining the second wave of BBC interactive videodisc titles.