

BBC compiles 20th century Domesday video

By **ROBIN STRINGER** *TV and Radio Correspondent*

A NEW Domesday Book of contemporary Britain is being compiled by the BBC on inter-active video disc at a cost of £3,500,000 from national sources of information, supplemented by contributions from some 10,000 schools.

The BBC claimed yesterday that the Government-backed project, which should be completed by October 1986 on the 900th anniversary of the completion of the original Domesday Book, will be one of the most comprehensive surveys of a country ever undertaken.

Collecting the information will involve people in every community in Britain, and a national photographic competition will give everyone a chance to contribute to the Domesday Discs.

The information gathered will be the equivalent of two full sets of Encyclopaedia Britannica, or two million pages of facts and maps, plus 85,000 photographs. But it will be contained on just two discs and will be retrievable by the user by micro-computer.

BBC series

Editor of the Domesday project is the BBC's Peter Armstrong, who is also producing a six-part BBC-1 series presented by the popular historian Michael Wood tracing the evolution of the land and the British people from the 11th century to the present day.

"We started with the plan for the series," he said, "but as the idea grew, it seemed obvious to us to use the latest technology to allow people to build up their own portrait of life in the community."

"The high technology system we are evolving will enable the user to travel across the country or go direct to a location uncovering pictures and text about it."

"Information will be as various as how the use of land has changed in Kent, where most old people live, or what and where are the rarest butterflies."

The cost is being shared between BBC Enterprises, the Department of Trade and Industry, and Philips, inventor of the laservision system being used in the project. Each party is putting up £500,000.

School targets

On top of that, Philips is investing a further £1 million in developing a new player for the Domesday Discs, and the BBC, who insist that licence-payers' money is not involved, a further £750,000 in other equipment for the project. At least £250,000 remains to be found.

With the cost of player, discs, interface and computer totalling £1,500, the end product is aimed at institutions, particularly schools, some

23,000 of which in this country already have a BBC micro-computer.

It is to these schools that the BBC is turning for help. After an immediate initial pilot project among 17 schools, next year some 10,000 will be assigned a local area of the country about which they will gather information to feed into their micro-computers to be stored on floppy discs or cassettes and then sent to the BBC.

Material will then be checked by an editorial committee under Prof. Ted Wragg, professor of education at Exeter University, one of seven different committees overseeing various aspects of the project, and supplemented by data from national sources.