

THE NEW DOMESDAY



Conservation at the British Library

LAMINATING

An extremely fragile leaf has been deacidified between sheets of tissue. Missing areas are being heat set with tissue after which the whole will be laminated. By so doing this embrittled paper will be restored to a usable condition.

The 900th anniversary of the completion of the original Domesday Book will be on 29th September 1986, and BBC TV network features will be producing a new computerised Domesday and a major six-part documentary series to mark the occasion.

The idea for a new Domesday project came from Peter Armstrong, Executive Producer of the series, and Editor of the project, who said, "Whereas the series will approach the subject from an 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 1980's — a contemporary snapshot".

Much of the data on the disc was collected in the course of 1985 by volunteer schools to produce a peoples' database, of information on local communities — prepared by the communities themselves. 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.

By the end of November 1984 every school in the country had

received an invitation to take part in the Domesday Project.

Some ten thousand are expected to accept the invitation and on the basis of such factors as their location and microcomputer equipment in the school each will be assigned a local map area for which to be responsible.

The information compiled by each school will consist of a complete survey of land-cover in each square kilometre of their area. This will involve a simple but professional method of determining what percentage of the area in each square is devoted to each of a dozen or so categories of land-cover (grassland, woodland, arable, etc). In addition, the schools will count how many of each of a range of community amenities from phone boxes to football grounds, from ponds to power stations, occur in each square kilometre. Thirdly, the schools will take and select a number of slide-photographs which they feel represent their area and approximately 20 pages of free description reflecting what they and local people think is important or relevant about their assigned locality.

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 microcomputers in a nationally co-ordinated educational project.

The schools project was carried out during the summer term of 1985 and to coincide with this activity, BBC schools television and radio provided substantial support, broadcasting information and advice in how to derive most benefit.

The benefits of the Domesday project will be two-fold. Firstly the practical learning experience of collecting the data, and secondly the long-term use in education of the finished discs.

In addition to the local data compiled specially for the project by volunteer schools, the Domesday 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 was guided by an editorial board of professional researchers, including, among others, representatives of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, the Centre of 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. This latter centre contains most of the major national surveys of computer-readable form and is charged with the responsibility of making this data available to researchers.

There will be 40,000 national pictures on the Domesday discs, too, in addition to the many thousands of local pictures compiled in the schools project. These were carefully researched in specialist archives and picture libraries such as the BBC's own Hulton Picture Library and cover those aspects of our national life best captured in pictures such as wildlife, fashion, leisure and family life.

It is planned to include data, maps and pictures at three levels: level one will be the whole country; level two will probably cover blocks of 40km by 30km and level three will cover localised blocks 4km by 3km. Thus it is hoped that the massive national support already mobilised behind the Domesday project will be fully-reflected in the truly national scope of data on the discs.