

The Countryside Images Project at the University of Reading's Museum of English Rural Life and Special Collections Service

The Countryside Images Project at the Museum of English Rural Life and Special Collections Service, University of Reading, Reading, United Kingdom, was a one year project to digitise, catalogue and make available 13 000 glass plate negatives from the Farmers Weekly and Farmer and Stockbreeder press collections. This was a pilot project, which digitising approximately 10 per cent of the Museum's glass plate negative collections, which form part of an extensive collection of rural images. The project started in October 2008 and finished in September 2009 and was funded by JISC as part of the Enriching Digital Resources programme, a strand of the Digitisation programme.



The project builds on previous successes at the Museum, including the completion of the Agricultural Glass Negatives Preservation Project, which repackaged 130 000 glass plate negatives into conservation grade materials in 2003, as well as the move of the Museum to new premises in 2005.



The images, dating from 1920-1965, illustrate the transformation of the English countryside from the era of horse power to tractors, and from manual labour to machinery. A wide range of subjects are covered and document arable and livestock farming, prevailing husbandry practices, the introduction of new technologies and the application of science to agriculture. The project also discovered some fascinating and unusual images, including a series of photographs showing a day in the life of a rural district nurse in 1947.



There were two full time project staff members, a Project Manager and a Project Archives Assistant. The digitisation of the glass plate negatives are undertaken in-house, by the project team, using a Microtek i900 scanner with Microtek ScanWizard Pro software. The images were scanned at 400 dpi, as .tif files and a small, low resolution .jpg was made. The catalogue and .jpg images will be made available on the University's new archive cataloguing system in late Autumn 2009. A selection of images available in an online exhibition at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/research/merl-digicountryimagesproject.aspx>.

The project has set up a group on the photograph sharing website, Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/countrysideimages>, where members of the public can upload their own photographs of countryside images.

The project was launched at the Royal Berkshire Show on 19 September 2009.

Digitised images are already being used by researchers, and have appeared on a recent programme for the BBC.



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