

Thursday 14 April 2011

**‘A tonic for the nation’:
The National Archives commemorates 60th anniversary of the Festival of Britain**

To coincide with the 60th anniversary of one of the most iconic festivals in the UK, images from The National Archives *Festival of Britain* collection series (WORK 25) have been published online for the first time. Highlighted as part of the [Archive Awareness Campaign](#), the images include artwork, architectural drawings, photographs of the South Bank and festival preparations.

The National Archives holds many thousands of unique items telling the story of the Festival. There are papers which reflect the origins of the idea, construction plans, photographs, sketches and colourful designs as well as all the official government memos.

Departments from across the British government took an interest in the Festival. For example, highlights from Foreign Office correspondence (FO 953) include ministerial discussions and briefing papers concerning the planning. The Festival took place against the backdrop of the Korean War which broke out in June 1950. Officials were concerned that if the Festival had been cancelled, this would have been interpreted abroad as a signal that Britain was preparing for war with the Soviet Union. Another record shows proposals were put forward in 1952 by the government to use the *Dome of Discovery* for a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Festival provided a brilliant display of the latest in modern British design and architecture. The collection also covers papers of committees that oversaw competitions to design various components of the Festival, even one for its symbol. Among the entrants was the renowned graphic designer Abram Games who won with his design showing the head of Britannia surmounting the star of the compass. Other works include watercolour panoramas of the South Bank by artists like Eric Fraser and JL Harvey, FHK Henrion’s ‘Painting of the Sun’s face’, architectural drawings by Hugh Casson; and unsuccessful competition entries (WORK 25/73).

Stephen Twigge, Head of Modern Domestic, Diplomatic & Colonial Records at The National Archives said:

“The Festival caught the national imagination as it still does today. Records held at The National Archives are fascinating for anyone with an interest in the history of modern Britain. They show the huge efforts in creating the event and the way work was divided between different organisations and government departments responsible. Memories are being reignited with the 60th anniversary and by making our unique collection more accessible, these records are getting the exposure they richly deserve”.

In 1947, after nearly a decade of war time austerity, rationing and making do, the government decided it was time for “a tonic for the nation”. Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary (grandfather of former Labour Cabinet Minister, Peter Mandleson) proposed to mark the centenary of the Great Exhibition in 1851 with “a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future, in the Arts, in Science and Technology, in Architecture and Building Research, and in Industrial design.”

The Festival opened on 3 May 1951 and brought a splash of colour to post-war Britain. During the summer over 8 million people visited the Festival exhibition on London’s South Bank. Events included exhibitions and displays about the land and people of Britain, pleasure gardens at Battersea Park, and village fetes and arts festivals in nearly 2000 cities and towns across the country.

Visitors to The National Archives’ online image library

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/imagelibrary/festival-of-britain-showcase.htm>

will be able to browse unique images depicting this period such as posters, photographs, architectural drawings, in addition to other key themes in our image library.

For more information, pictures and interview request please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

– Ends –

Notes to Editors

- Additional information on how to license and purchase prints from our fascinating Festival collection is available from the image library's showcase page at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/imagelibrary/festival-of-britain-showcase.htm>

A selection of **Festival of Britain** material is on display in the onsite museum at The National Archives from April 2011 until 1 July 2011.

Venue: The National Archives, Kew, Richmond TW9 4UD

Nearest Tube: Kew Gardens

Admission: Free

Museum opening times: Tuesday-Saturday 9am-5pm. Closed Monday and Sunday.

The National Archives

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archives of the UK government, it cares for, makes available and brings alive a vast collection of over 1000 years of historical records, including the treasured Domesday Book.

Not only safeguarding historical information, The National Archives also manages current digital information and devises new technological solutions for keeping government records readable now and in the future. It provides world class research facilities and expert advice, publishes all UK legislation and official publications, and is a leading advocate for the archive sector. At the heart of information policy, The National Archives sets standards of best practice that actively promotes and encourages public access to, and the re-use of information, both online or onsite at Kew. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensures that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

Archive Awareness Campaign

The Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is spearheaded by the Archives & Records Association (ARA) (www.archives.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk). It is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.