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The 1901 Census Test Site proves popular with users With over a million downloads in first month

As a precursor to 24/7 running, the 1901 Census online site – www.census.pro.gov.uk – has entered a new phase of public testing and is proving popular with users. Internet users can now access the site for 20 hours daily from 09:00 to 05:00 (GMT plus one hour). Since August, when it went back online as a test site, more than 10 million searches of the database have been successfully completed, with over a million downloads in the first month.

QinetiQ and the Public Record Office (PRO) have been working together to ensure the robustness and effectiveness of the new site since the original service was withdrawn earlier this year when unprecedented demand forced it to be closed. Improvements have included increasing the bandwidth and implementing software enhancements to further upgrade performance, together resulting in database capacity being more than doubled. This has been followed by a thorough and rigorous test programme, leading to this final, pre-release phase.

The facility for unlimited free search access with a low-cost 'pay-per-view' payment for downloads seems to be popular, with more than a million separate images/transcription details downloaded in the last month.

"It has been a difficult few months and we are all sorry for the frustration and inconvenience that everyone has felt. The increase in opening hours for the site is however excellent news for users in the UK and around the world," said Alison Webster, the Public Record Office's Head of e-Access.

"We believe that this is the best and most affordable model for the general public to access information from the 1901 Census. We have now provided a user-friendly site that will prove a valuable resource for years to come," said James Kirby, Director at QinetiQ.

The 1901 Internet Test Site was opened in August following a restricted trial at the Family Records Centre and Kew Public Record Office. It was implemented to enable detailed monitoring of user requirements and allow any modifications or optimisation of the site settings to be made prior to launching the live service.

A representative selection from the many positive comments received from users include:

"Absolutely fantastic. I found all references for each of my four grandparents' families. I am very very happy. It was worth the wait. Cheers." D R - Melbourne, Australia.

"Long time coming but well worth the wait. The search form is very clear and any difficulty I have had is because I have not known the correct parish name and in some cases I had completely the wrong basic information. Very good - keep up the good work - half the world was waiting for this." Ms A – Leicester, England

"Just to say it was well worth waiting for! Response time is excellent and I have found a missing link. Thanks for a superb site!" R M - Jersey.

Technical Notes:

1901 Census Online, www.census.pro.gov.uk, gives users unlimited online free access to the complete 1901 Census database for searches by name, place, institution or vessel. Users pay only when they want to download images of the census pages or transcripts. These cost 75p (images) or 50p (transcripts). Users have a choice for paying – either by credit card or with a special voucher. For credit card users there is a £5 minimum charge which can be used to purchase images and transcripts. Vouchers come in units of £5, £10 and £50 – once used they are valid for six months.

Transcription: user feedback to the *Test Phase* has been very positive. The 1901 Census for England and Wales spans over 1.5 million pages and contains between 20 and 30 fields of information for each of the 32.5 million people - consequently some transcription errors will have occurred. Some errors are due to when the original census was taken whilst others relate to the modern day deciphering of the styles of handwriting used by the original enumerators. Errors made by the original enumerator in 1901 are left in place as they are a part of the Census as a historical document. If the error has arisen from the modern transcription process, however, users can complete an online data amendment form. The form is then thoroughly checked before any amendments are made to the database. A change log will show users when amendments were made and the nature of the amendment.

Ease of access for the general public: several key factors in the original design for the 1901 Census site were functionality and ease of operation. It had to accept various methods of payment; and most importantly was priced to be affordable by the general public.

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Editors' Notes

- ◆ **QinetiQ** (pronounced ki' ne tik as in 'kinetic energy'), is one of Europe's largest science and technology solutions providers. Among its staff it employs many leading scientists and internationally acclaimed experts. It offers a unique range of services, consultancy advice and test facilities. QinetiQ operates in markets as diverse as information technology, telecommunications, electronics, marine, energy, automotive, rail, defence, space, health, oil & gas and aerospace
- ◆ **The Public Record Office (PRO)** holds the National Archives of England, Wales and the United Kingdom. Its collections cover over 1000 years and range from Domesday Book to the latest government papers to be released to the public.

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