

case study

SpectrumITech

Electronic
digitisation and
photography

East of England Sense of Place



Photographs
courtesy of
Manningtree
Museum



Highlights

- **Multi-media data capture with web interface**
- **Immeasurably improved data access**
- **Instantaneous search across Essex Museum collections**
- **Assists educational needs and developments**
- **Enhanced sense of heritage and community**

Sense of Place Project

In June 2002 Spectrum were successful in winning the contract to undertake the electronic digitisation and photography of over 70,000 images and artefacts associated with the Essex County Council administered Sense of Place Project. This enterprise is a NOF (New Opportunities Fund) sponsored, web-enabled visualisation project aimed at remotely delivering images of cultural, educational, archaeological and historic interest via the Internet to the public. Much of these data are unique and rare, originating from collections of national importance. Access to the majority of artefacts had been very limited. The project involved objects from a consortium of 8 local authority museum services and 18 independent museums across Essex. Digital data capture was undertaken from three main sources. Essex Record Office in Chelmsford provided nearly 38,000 images on a variety of media, the Heritage Conservation Unit supplied 10,000 aerial photographs for scanning and the 26 Essex Museum Organisations provided some 10,000 objects as diverse as Medieval coins and bibles, lifeboats and Bronze Age brooches. With so many different museum organisations participating, it became necessary to ensure a clear and easily understandable criterion to select 10,000 museum objects. To ensure the museums maintained ownership of this project they were allowed to select the objects from their collections to be captured.

SpectrumITech advantages

- **Completed on time and within budget**
- **Innovative and compliant solution**
- **Flexible and professional approach to data capture**
- **Superior quality control, reporting and audit facilities**

Working in close liaison with Essex County Council staff, Essex Record Office and with considerable assistance and input of the museum custodians and staff, Spectrum undertook to digitally capture and index all chosen artefacts and ephemera over a period of 9 months. This required a major effort in both logistics and administration, with some museum sites manned by volunteers, some privately run, others consisting of dispersed collections and others requiring suitable weather to photograph large objects such as farm machinery and traction engines which were stored in the open.

Once the objects were selected for digitisation, supporting information was provided by the appropriate museum to Spectrum. This information was primarily derived from the museums catalogue records (MODES).

Where organisations already have existing computer database systems, the information will be migrated to the existing SEAX database system. As part of the project, a data migration routine was developed between MODES and SEAX to allow easy text data transfers in the future. There are 12 text/data fields in East of England Sense of Place Project schema, with varying field lengths. As each museum had developed slightly different data fields, it transpired that each organisation did not necessarily submit information for every field.

Generating nearly 400 Gbytes of image data over the duration of the project, Spectrum had teams of dedicated camera and scanning operatives mobilised at each location working to a predetermined schedule. Using state of the art equipment such as the portable ICAM Guardian scanner and Nikon D100 digital camera, data was



Photograph courtesy of Barleylands Farm Museum

captured in compliance with Museum Service handling procedures, NOF and TASI guidelines in association with Spectrum's own ISO9001: 2000 accredited Quality Assurance procedures. All images were viewed and accepted at the capture location by qualified museum staff for suitability and clarity prior to the image being committed to disk storage. Following capture, all data was forwarded to Spectrum's Woking bureau for verification, additional quality control and indexing.

This digitisation project has formed a centrepiece of the East of England Sense of Place Project. The images captured are supported by textual descriptive information about each object and introductory screens provide information concerning the host museum and additional hyperlinks to other museum sites.

The project provides a public access database that can be interrogated across numerous sectors and separate organisations (voluntary, commercial and public). Furthermore the project has been designed to develop beyond the facilities and features provided by the initial NOF funding. Both the Record Office and Essex Museums, in conjunction with MIEC, are developing sustainable digitisation programmes that will continue to feed into the database and ensure the number of publicly available objects continues to grow.

Photographs courtesy of Digital Photographic Services.

ECC Website link: <http://eesopessex.essexcc.gov.uk>



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