



Deputy Chief Minister

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **National Archives' Digitisation of 18th Century Records Is Almost Complete**

Exactly 267 years ago, on 12th May 1749, His Majesty the King George II ordered the then Governor of Gibraltar, Lieutenant General Humphrey Bland to conduct a strict enquiry into the ownership of property on the Rock.

The record of the Court of Enquiry into property grants at Gibraltar 1749, a record held in the Gibraltar National Archives, describes it thus:

“Many disputes have arisen in Gibraltar [in relation to] the property of houses, and complaints have been frequently made that Gibraltar Governors' by their sole authority, have taken these houses for their own advantage. The King, therefore, ordered Lieutenant General Bland to conduct a strict enquiry into the truth.”

The 1749 Court of Enquiry document is one of the Archives' most important records. In a way, it marked the beginning of proper administration and administrative procedures in Gibraltar. Notwithstanding the fact that Lieutenant General Bland was a military officer, his work could be described as being at the inception of Gibraltar's municipal administration.

These records and many others like them from the 18th century have now be digitised and can be viewed on the Archives website, [www.nationalarchives.gi](http://www.nationalarchives.gi)

The digitisation of the Bland document was a very delicate, time-consuming process. The historical record had suffered considerable deterioration so, prior to digitisation, a number of conservation treatments were undertaken. The record is housed within an over-sized, bound volume from the period, that presented its unique scanning problems, also, it is a lengthy record consisting of over 300 pages. Nevertheless, the process worked very well, and the National Archives are now in a position to make accessible online a high definition PDF document presented in original period script, as well as a search engine designed by the Archivist, Anthony Pitaluga, from a transcription by Tito Benady.

The digitisation process involves two main areas of responsibility i.e. preservation and access. There is also a third aspect that arises from the digitisation process: digital preservation.



One of the main benefits of digitisation is to preserve unique, rare and fragile documents by enhancing access to the digital copies to multiple numbers of users simultaneously (thus far the original physical documents have been confined to the four walls of the Archives building). Once digitised, access to the original physical documents will be restricted on the grounds of long term or even indefinite preservation. Only the digital copies will be accessible, thus the originals will be handled considerably less if at all.

The process of ensuring long-term, resilient access to digital content by putting in place measures that will help to deliver enduring value from digital collection. Digital Preservation is the final step in the GNA digitisation policy. Once created, the digital files are stored within GNA's Digital Preservation Vault that not only preserves our digital files but also serves as a backup of all our digital information. Further to this, the DPV is what is referred to as a 'self-healing' digital vault because, once stored, six copies are automatically created and stored in separate locations. Therefore, if there is file corruption in any one location, a good copy of the file will be copied across from another location. It is highly unlikely, that all six copies will corrupt at the same time. Even if that were to happen there are also the in-house backups.

It is important to consider that digitisation in no way implies online publication. At this point only the Bland document is online. However, the whole 18th Century collection and more is accessible by visiting the Archives in person.