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Introduction

Eric de Rothschild, Chairman of The Rothschild Archive Trust

On behalf of my fellow trustees I am pleased to welcome you to the fifteenth issue of The Rothschild Archive’s Review of the Year. We are delighted to note that our collections attract the interest of a wide range of scholars from all over the world who find material relevant to studies ranging from banking and financial history to horticulture. The constant discoveries they make help us all to learn from the past, and also to appreciate the importance of primary sources. Two of our visitors have contributed to this issue of the Review: Brian Cathcart offers a carefully considered account of the first news of the Battle of Waterloo in which he examines many of the myths surrounding this event. Francesca Murray explores the role played by several members of the Rothschild family in the development of orchid trade. I am grateful to them both for sharing the results of their work with us.

The Rothschild business in London provides us with superb accommodation for the storage of our collections and for their consultation. The Trustees value this important relationship. The Reading Room, the work of the Yorkshire family firm of Robert Thompson’s Craftsmen Ltd., continues to attract admiration from our many visitors. The Archive is also supported by Rothschild family banks, vineyards and foundations and I thank them all, on behalf of the Trustees, for their continuing generosity.

Additions to our collections this year have arrived from Rothschild businesses, from members of my family and from organisations with which they have historical associations. I draw your attention in particular to the happy collaboration between the Archive and The Wildlife Trusts, which has led to the deposit of papers relating to the first national survey in the UK of wildlife sites carried out by Charles Rothschild in 1912. This relationship was enhanced thanks to the Rothschild Scientists project which featured in previous issues of the Review.

Finally I thank the staff of the Archive for their continued dedication to their work and their enthusiasm in promoting the collection to our many users.
Review of the year’s work

Melanie Aspey, Director of The Rothschild Archive

The nature and extent of research at the Archive continues to develop. Occasionally this is in predictable ways, linked, for example, to anniversaries such as the centenary of the outbreak of World War I or the forthcoming bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo. Even the predictable can produce unexpected results, such as those uncovered by Professor Brian Catheart in his article on page 11. And then, the unexpected, such as the riches in the Archive available to the historian of the orchid, as revealed by Francesca Murray in her article on page 19. It is the aim of The Rothschild Archive to act as a hub for research into all aspects of the history of the Rothschild family and our London Reading Room provides the most congenial environment for this research to take place. Additionally our ‘virtual reading room’ – the Archive’s website – continues to evolve under the management of Justin Cavernelis-Frost and with the creative support of Natalie Broad.

Research Project

Our investigations into the lives and work of the members of the Rothschild family who pursued their scientific interests, occasionally in conjunction with a business career, led the project director, Dr Jenni Thomas, down some rewarding research paths. The Archive’s exposure to a wide range of new communities as a result of this project has been a most satisfying outcome.

A fruitful relationship has been the partnership with The Royal Society and Kingston University (as reported in the last issue of this Review) which brings together historians, archivists and practising scientists to research women’s participation in science and learned societies in Britain since 1840, inspired in large measure by our interest in the position of Miriam Rothschild in the scientific pantheon. The project, WISRNet, was formally launched during the 24th International Congress of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine at the University of Manchester in July 2013. The inspiring speech by Professor Ludmilla Jordanova to inaugurate the project is available on the project’s website. WISRNet developed a unique shadowing scheme, to pair up historians of science with working women scientists. The historians spent two half days with their allotted scientist to discover more about the nature of their work and the challenges and obstacles before them in a scientific career. Aside from bringing a deeper understanding of the field to the historians, these conversations encouraged the scientists to reflect on their achievements, their hopes and expectations.

The Archive hosted two meetings of the WISRNet Steering Committee during the year.

Outreach

The Archivist, Justin Cavernelis-Frost, participated in a local history festival in Aston Clinton, in the heartland of the Vale of Aylesbury where the Rothschild family began their long association in the middle of the nineteenth century. Conversations which began at that event led to the happy collaboration between the Archive and the Trustees of The Anthony Hall in Aston Clinton on the work to repair, copy and display the joint portrait of Constance and Annie de Rothschild, benefactors of Aston Clinton.

Exhibitions

The Archive enjoys the opportunity to display some items from the collection in contexts which emphasise their significance. A recent acquisition, a gift from the estate of the late Leopold de Rothschild, was lent to Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, which held a retrospective exhibition on the career of René Lalique, the first to be held in the Netherlands.

Visits

The Archive welcomed numerous special interest groups from the international archive community.

- Several members of the staff of The Parliamentary Archives visited The Rothschild Archive at New Court and were warm and generous hosts in return during our visit in April 2014.
- Archivists from the Salvation Army were welcomed to the Archive in December 2013.
- In June 2013 a group of members of the Vereinigte Westfälische Adelsarchive e. V. came to the Archive during their visit to the UK. The organisation was established in 1923 to ensure the preservation of the archives of family estates, to ensure their development and to make the resources available to researchers.
- The Director visited Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge in July 2013 at the invitation of the Master of Churchill College. The Centre’s director, Allen Packwood, highlighted the many points of contact between the Rothschild and Churchill families in evidence in the collection.

Archives at Roubaix

In March 2014 the Chairman of The Rothschild Archive Trust, Baron Eric de Rothschild, and the Director together visited the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail (ANMT) in Roubaix, where the archives of the French family’s activities are held on deposit. The Archive plans to carry on further research into the collections over the coming months and years, building on the cataloguing work that has already taken place by the staff at Roubaix and by employees and contractors of the Archive. The catalogue is accessible on the website of the ANMT with a link from the Archive’s site.
Future plans

The Archive looks forward to working with colleagues from the Frankfurt Jewish Museum, which will close for a period of two years from summer 2015, as they develop their concept for the interpretation of the history of the Jews of Frankfurt in a new gallery. The Museum is currently housed in a former Rothschild property on the Untermainkai, which will be the base of the Museum’s future permanent exhibitions.

The staff of the Archive looks forward to developing knowledge of the collections on deposit at the ANMT in Roubaix, and to making them better known to the research community.

NOTES

Nathan Rothschild and the Battle of Waterloo

Brian Cathcart explores an enduring myth about a key period in Rothschild history.

That Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777–1836) was the first person in London to know of Wellington’s victory at Waterloo in 1815 has been asserted so often it is widely accepted as a historical fact. No less a historian than Elizabeth Longford repeated the claim in her great biography of the Duke in the 1970s, and more recently it appeared in Niall Ferguson’s official history of the Rothschild family:1 A second assertion is just as widely known: that Rothschild exploited his exclusive knowledge to make a killing on the Stock Exchange, probably employing some kind of deception to augment his profits. Versions of this have appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica and the Dictionary of National Biography, in scores of histories of Waterloo, of the Stock Exchange and of British Jewry, in works on business practice and intelligence, and in novels.2 In a more sinister vein it formed the basis of a 1940 Nazi propaganda film, Die Rothschilds: Aktie auf Waterloo, and it continues to find favour on neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic websites.
The story is more legend than fact. Not only is there nothing in the surviving historical record to suggest that Rothschild was the first in London to know of Waterloo, but we can say with some confidence that another man had that distinction. As for Nathan Rothschild making a killing, while it is likely that he made profits that week any gains can only have been modest by comparison with the fortunes made by others. And there is no question of trickery.

How such an ill-founded tale managed to gain currency and respectability is a curiosity in its own right, and there is no escaping the influence of anti-Semitism. As Victor, 3rd Lord Rothschild (1910–1990) found when he investigated these matters, the decisive event was the publication in Paris in 1846 of a pamphlet entitled *Histoire Edifiante et Curieuse de Rothschild 1er, Roi des Juifs*, whose author signed himself simply ‘Satan’. An attack on James de Rothschild (1792–1868) as a ruthless capitalist and enemy of the French people, it sold across Europe by the tens of thousands and it included the lurid tale of how James’s brother Nathan profited from the deaths of Frenchmen at Waterloo. Nathan, it was said, witnessed the battle in person and rode in haste to the coast, where he bullied and bribed a fisherman into ferrying him to England through a terrible storm. In this way he reached London twenty-four hours before the official news and ‘gained twenty million in a single coup’ on the stock market. Such cynical opportunism at the expense of French people, insisted ‘Satan’, was typical of the Rothschilds: ‘This family is our evil genius.’

As the wealth and fame of the Rothschilds increased in the subsequent decades, so did the curiosity and envy of others, and the ‘Satan’ story was frequently repeated and just as frequently embellished. Notably, the element of trading subterfuge was added. No sooner had Nathan reached the City of London, it was claimed, than he deliberately provoked a collapse...
in stock market confidence by encouraging rumours that Wellington had been defeated. Only when prices were near to rock bottom, and after many investors had been ruined, did he begin to buy, and in this way he was able to double the gains he made when the victory became known. One historian remarked: ‘We cannot estimate how many liveried servants, how many Watteaus and Rembrandts, how many thoroughbreds in his descendants’ stables, the man by the pillar [Rothschild] won that single day.’

This enhanced version of the story appeared in a 1915 history of the Rothschilds by the German author Ignatius Balla, but by then the narrative was under some stress.8 One problem was that the dramatic events of Waterloo were well established; anyone with knowledge of the battle was aware that Nathan Rothschild wasn’t there.8 Another was that the Rothschild family and its friends were increasingly uncomfortable about this ugly tale. Alternative stories now surfaced to explain Rothschild’s early knowledge. Some of these, such as the claim that the news travelled by pigeon, were pure fantasy – there was no organised use of homing pigeons on this scale.9 In contrast to the well-known historian Wolf, a journalist and historian who was friendly to the Rothschild family, and Wolf asserted privately that the news of Waterloo was brought to Nathan Rothschild by an agent who learned of it at Ghent in Belgium, where the exiled French king, Louis XVIII, was staying. On the morning after the battle this agent saw a messenger deliver to Louis a letter announcing the victory and so he rushed to London by way of Ostend to inform his employer.

Rothschild then did some profitable trading on the Stock Exchange before informing the government of what he knew.

This story, which only reached a wide public with the publication of various memoirs towards the end of the nineteenth century, has some foundation in recorded fact. Newspapers of the week that followed Waterloo reported that a ‘Mr C of Dover’ was present in Ghent when the news reached Louis XVIII on Monday 19 June and that he hurried to London, which he must have reached during the night of Tuesday to Wednesday – perhaps as much as twenty-four hours before the official word of the victory. This Mr C therefore has the distinction of having been the first person in London to know the French had been beaten – so far as the known, contemporaneous historical record states. But there is nothing in that record to connect Mr C with Nathan Rothschild. Only Wellington’s table talk provides that link, and Wellington, very obviously, was not in London when these events occurred. His evidence is hearsay at best, and analysis shows that his tale improved with the telling: early versions of it did not mention Rothschild at all.

Further, Mr C’s actions once he reached London scarcely accord with Wellington’s tale, because he appears to have shared his information freely and at the first opportunity. Again, the newspapers of those days are our witnesses and they record that the gentleman who had come from Ghent was telling his story publicly in the City on Wednesday morning – reports of it were in print as early as noon. This is not consistent with suggestions that Rothschild exploited the information for purposes of insider trading. (There is a further tradition which identifies the gentleman from Ghent as John Roworth, a known employee and messenger for Nathan Rothschild. But a letter in The Rothschild Archive leaves no doubt that Roworth was in London on that Monday and so could not have been in Ghent.)

A further reason exists for believing that Mr C was not, as Wellington claimed, a Rothschild employee. One surviving newspaper from the relevant days mentions Rothschild, and tells us that he did indeed receive early information of the battle. This was the Caledonian Mercury of Edinburgh, whose London correspondent wrote the following on the Wednesday evening, a few hours before Wellington’s messenger reached town with the official confirmation of the victory:

In a familiar pose, Nathan Rothschild is depicted in this cartoon of the Rothschild Exchange by J.R. and G. Cruikshank, 1821. Ref. 505/777

Good news – to be relied upon – Lord Wellington was joined on the 18th by 20,000 Prussians under Bülow and beat Bonaparte completely, taking nearly the whole of his artillery. Omnium is now up at 6. This I have from good authority – one who has seen a letter from Ghent, received by Rosschild, the great stockbroker whose information is invariably the best. He is now at the Foreign Office.
Nathan Rothschild therefore received a letter from Ghent (and not a messenger) some time on Wednesday, 21 June. And significantly the piece of information cited in the newspaper report – relating to the Prussians – is not information that is attributed to Mr C in the earlier reports. In short, Rothschild had a different informant who sent him different information.

Let us take stock. Nathan Rothschild was not at Waterloo. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that he made special arrangements to have early news of the battle, whether by pigeon post or more conventional means. There is nothing in the historical record to suggest that he was the first person in London to know of the victory, indeed the evidence points firmly towards Mr C. Nor, despite Wellington's later assertions, do we have reason to believe that Mr C brought his news to Rothschild. What we do know, on the basis of contemporaneous evidence, is that Rothschild was one of a number of people in London who received private information about the battle before Wellington's official dispatch was delivered at about 11pm on Wednesday.

At what time on Wednesday he received his letter from Ghent we can’t be sure. The Caledonian Mercury correspondent almost certainly composed his report with the view that it should be up to date to about 7.30pm, so that it could depart on the 8pm mail coach to Edinburgh. No news of Rothschild’s letter had appeared in the London evening papers, which were avid for such information but which closed their final editions between 3pm and 4pm. Moreover the Mercury report speaks of Omnium, a government security, being ‘up at 6’, a price it did not attain until the afternoon.

A further clue indicates that it reached him before the close of trading on the Stock Exchange. John Roworth, the Rothschild employee mentioned above, subsequently travelled to Paris on bank business, and in late July he wrote a letter to Nathan which included the postscript: ‘I am informed by Commissary White you have done well by the early information which you had of the victory gained at Waterloo.’ It is nothing more than an aside and it presumably refers to the letter from Ghent, but it may shed light on timings. For Rothschild to have ‘done well by’ the early information in the conventional, financial sense, he must have had time to conduct some business on the Stock Exchange on Wednesday. Thursday morning, after the overnight official confirmation of victory had sent stocks sharply upwards, would have been too late. In sum, the various clues suggest that Rothschild’s letter from Ghent reached him in the course of Wednesday afternoon.

Consideration of Roworth’s postscript brings us to the suggestion that Rothschild manipulated the market, and once again there is no evidence for this. In particular, the often-repeated claim that he engineered a panic and a slump in prices by spreading word of a defeat is disproved by the progression of the price of Omnium on the Tuesday and Wednesday. This was the government security whose movements were most closely linked to success or failure on the battlefront, and it never slumped. According to the daily stock reports in the Morning Chronicle, Omnium opened on Wednesday at 4 3/4 per cent premium, climbed to around 6 per cent and then slipped back to 4 1/4 per cent at the close. Why did it slip back? It is true that there were rumours of a defeat (as well as further reports of victory), and we also know that there was profit-taking, but the decline should be seen in context: Omnium fell no lower than its opening price on the day, and that in turn was the highest price it had reached up to that date. A stock that dips below its peak is not the same as a stock that slumps.

It appears likely, from Roworth’s postscript, that Rothschild bought stocks on Wednesday afternoon. If he did so at around 1 per cent premium then he could have sold the next day at 8 per cent or more – a very handsome overnight return fully worth the description ‘doing well’. But again context is required. Many investors made far larger profits that week. The original contractors to that month’s government loan – at that time the largest ever raised –

In this letter of 24 August 1815 Nathan’s brother James expresses his disbelief that Nathan could have turned down a knighthood offered by a grateful British Government in the weeks after Waterloo. He briefly abandons the Hebrew alphabet and German language to write ‘the honors of the Nighthood’ – third line from the bottom.

BAL XI/159/2/49
had acquired Omnium at par and were able to take on holdings as large as they chose. Some
supporting evidence it is probably time historians relegated this legend to the margins and the
footnotes.

Brian Cathcart is professor of journalism at Kingston University London and is the author of
The Case of Stephen Lawrence (1999) and The Fly in the Cathedral: How a small group of
Cambridge scientists won the race to split the atom (2014). He was also a founder of the
campaign group Hacked Off. His latest book, The News from Waterloo: How Britain learned of
Wellington’s triumphs will be published by Faber & Faber in April 2015.

An Absolute Passion: The Rothschilds’ orchid collections at Gunnersbury Park, Tring Park, Exbury Gardens – and London’s East End

Francesca Murray reveals an unexpected link between nurserymen and a refinery in her study of the Rothschild family’s passion for orchids.

Orchids held a special fascination for the Rothschild family throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were amongst a number of plants that the family collected; however, the orchid was exceptional, providing the beauty and varieties of form with the horticultural challenge of its cultivation, which made it a cherished family asset. The rarity of the orchid and its high price at auction was a fitting trophy for the richest family in England and its exotic flowers complemented the lavish interiors of the Rothschild houses. The orchids were also a pleasurable distraction from the business of banking and for sharing with friends.

The provision of manpower and horticultural expertise, together with the installation of the latest glasshouse technology needed to grow the orchid, was a demonstration of the wealth of the family and the high standards of excellence espoused by its members. But it also revealed their personal devotion to these new, peculiar plants that flooded into the nurseries of the early nineteenth century. Early exposure to orchids as a child led to Ferdinand de Rothschild’s (1839–1908) patronage of the orchid expert Friedrich Sander (1847–1910) and ensured the family were at the vanguard of the introduction of the genus into Europe and England.

Indeed some orchids were named after family members in appreciation. It appealed enough to first Lord Rothschild, Nathaniel de Rothschild (1808–1911) and his son Walter (1808–1897) at Tring Park and later Lionel de Rothschild (1883–1944) at Exbury to join the group of orchidologists of the Royal Horticultural Society, namely the Orchid Committee, which gave them an opportunity to be involved scientifically. As orchid species became more rare, and in order to extend the orchid flowering period for cutting, orchid hybridisation became the objective in the professional and amateur glasshouses of England and Europe. The Rothschild gardeners were no exception, cultivating numerous orchid hybrids, which won many RHS awards. A further step taken in the early twentieth century by Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury was to experiment in the germination of orchid seed, a field that had been largely unsolved.

All of these were more than enough reasons for a Rothschild to become passionately attached to this genus. But, perhaps more fundamentally there was an emotional connection between the family and the imported orchid plants. Both the family and the orchid genus were outliers, seen as exotic, curious and yet ultimately fascinating. Both were expensive bound in their uniqueness, subjects of envy, tricky to look after, with seemingly eccentric characteristics that needed special care and handling. When cultivation and treatment of these exotic specimens was fruitful, the results were often breath-taking. Orchids collected from distant lands by plant collectors who often risked their lives searching for these unique specimens were part of global networks that as bankers the Rothschilds shared.

Notes


4. Aaron Levine, Case studies in Jewish history: 

5. Aaron Levine, Case studies in Jewish history: 

6. Aaron Levine, Case studies in Jewish history: 

11. N.1/112/31 and 112/34.
Gardening and collecting rare plants have many parallels to banking in terms of the planning, cultivating and growing, anticipation and legacy. And despite the limitations of their time, an interest in horticulture between Nathan Rothschild (1777–1836) and his four brothers for furnishing their gardens with the latest exotic plants available in new glasshouses, naturally included orchids.1 Horticultural changes were afoot in England: the glass tax was abolished in 1843, and with an easing of the timber duty in 1811 new glasshouse suppliers sprang up from the 1810s.2 The heating of greenhouses had changed with hot water boiler systems becoming popular to create the ideal environment for tender stove plants. The plants still had to get to the customer’s glasshouse in one piece first. The invention around 1829 of the Wardian case helped transport the live plants to England.

In 1835 Nathan Rothschild bought Gunnersbury Park, a substantial and established estate near Ealing, just outside London, previously owned by Princess Amelia (1783–1862), George III’s aunt. After Nathan’s untimely death in 1836, his wife, Hannah (1783–1850) followed by his son Lionel (1808–1879) and daughter in law, Charlotte (1819–1884) continued to develop Gunnersbury Park and expand the grounds. Charlotte’s invitations were even more popular than the Queen’s, who was a frequent visitor.3 The garden tour was a feature for visitors of the estates, including James Hudson (1810–1899) of Mentmore, John Jennings Smith (1846–1903) of Gunnersbury and George Reynolds of Ascott.4

The Rothschilds used their established international networks of bank agents to obtain rare and exotic plants including orchids for Gunnersbury.5 Often these agents would have little knowledge of what they were being asked to source, and this sometimes led to impatience with seemingly unintelligible new plant names.6 Orchids were grown in the extensive glasshouses and Charlotte published her own catalogue of her orchids at Gunnersbury.7

Since the sixteenth century, there had been a tradition of the rich and wealthy cataloguing their newly acquired orchid plant collections in richly illustrated books called Floraegia.8 Charlotte’s catalogue is modest and unillustrated, simply listing the thirty-four different species of orchid at Gunnersbury. However, it is packed with contemporary detail of the world of orchid collecting. It notes the geographical origin of each orchid and states from whom the orchid was sourced with a short description of its botanical name giving clues to dating it to around the 1830s. The names include James Veitch of Chelsea, Dominy and Seden his orchid hybridisers; orchid hunters, Harston, Lobbs, and Ross; Lady Tankerville, the Duke of Devonshire (a celebrated orchid collector) and Joseph Hooker of Kew.9 It demonstrates how exclusive her collection was whilst revealing an expert knowledge of orchids. The ‘Vanda tessii’ is also detailed in the diary of Thomas Hobbs, a gardener at Gunnersbury Park who noted over 200 of their blooms, a fact that was noted in the Gardener’s Chronicle and shared around the family. On 27 April, 1898 he sent ‘33 spikes for Lord Rothschild and 1 dozen for Newmarket’.

The Rothschilds had become advocates of the science of hybridisation, underlined by the agreement of Leopold to host a visit from delegates of the RHS Conference of Genetics (where the term genetics was first coined) of 1906. The delegates visited Gunnersbury Park for tea and enjoyed a tour of the gardens and glasshouses.10 Lionel de Rothschild (1842–1942) addressed the delegates at dinner, confident of this new scientific approach. He would later apply these early lessons at Exbury.11

Tring Park was given to Nathaniel de Rothschild, or ‘Natty’ as he was known, in 1872 by his father. It became known as a centre for the zoological research of his son, Walter, at his purpose-built private museum. However, in the glasshouses there was scientific experimentation too.12 Walter inherited an avid interest in botany and orchids were his favourite plant.13 He was appointed Vice President of the RHS in 1904, an honorary post he held for 13 years and became known as ‘a patron of the science of horticulture’. He attended meetings of the RHS Orchid Committee and even presented photographs of his newly flowered orchids.14 Varieties cultivated by hand at Tring, such as Cattleya Mannii ‘Tring Park’ var, Cattleya Hoodiana ‘Tring Park’ var, were awarded First Class Certificates and he was deeply involved in supervising their cultivation for year round spectacle.15 Both his head gardeners served on the RHS Orchid Committee: Edwin Hill (d.1914) and Arthur Dye, carried out pioneering work with the orchids and the Phalaenopsis species for which Tring Park became well known.16 Walter inherited an avid interest in orchids from his father. He wrote to Colonel Prain at Kew, ‘varieties now growing are a number of Leiospathis gigantea and Dasyanthus giganteus and numbers of rare Bulbophyllums Catasetum and other orchids of botanical interest.’17

Fertilising orchids was not an easy task as Darwin himself had noted in his paper of 1862.18 Walter Rothschild had been fascinated with fertilisation of orchids by insects and argued his theories in the Orchid Review with other orchid specialists.19 The 1909 catalogue of Tring
View of Tring Park, where Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild established his greenhouses. Photograph by Rosante Cavemelli.
Park orchids noted over 2,324 orchid hybrids developed at Tring, some of which may have been developed from plants shared by the Gunnersbury Park estate and from members of the family. Walter was the youngest recipient of the RHS Victoria Medal of Honour in its inaugural year of 1897 for his orchid hybridisation. His brother Charles, an entomologist with a keen eye for the detail of classification, focused his orchid passion on native orchids in their natural habitats. An album of photographs taken by Charles of native orchids in situ shows a keen conservationist’s eye. As the heir of Tring Park he bequeathed the Tring orchid collections to Kew Gardens on his own early death in 1941, having contributed many plants and seeds to the Herbarium in his lifetime.

Lionel de Rothschild created his first garden at the age of five and he is well known for the rhododendrons and azaleas at his garden at Exbury. However he collected a number of other plant groups, of which orchids were of special interest. He developed a substantial orchid collection, which included Cymbidiums, Cattleyas, Odontoglossums, Miltonias and Calanthes some of which may have been brought to Exbury from Gunnersbury Park and also exchanged with those of Tring Park. In 1928, he was invited onto the RHS Orchid committee by Sir Jeremiah Colman (1859–1942) of Gatton Park and was voted Vice Chairman in 1929. Benjamin Hills became head of the orchid house which was housed in a large glass-house complex incorporating a specially built orchid laboratory. Lionel took the new genus extremely seriously. He wrote to Colman saying ‘my main aim is eventually to show only home grown orchids.’

To do this he wanted to be able to successfully germinate and propagate more orchids himself. For an amateur to invest in scientific experimentation to germinate orchid seeds was ambitious, as they needed a sterile environment and scientific process of treatment. However, Lionel immediately set to the task. The financial rewards to solving this botanical conundrum would have been colossal, as even the commercial nurseries struggled with propagating some orchid species. In this, however, Lionel had one unusual and unexpected advantage. The Rothschild bank had operated the Royal Mint Refinery in the East End of London since 1852.
from 1845 to 1893, a spare laboratory was used to test seeds of Cymbidium, Odontoglossum and Laelia Cattleya. Lionel’s instructions to Mr Williams at the Royal Mint Refinery gave a specific approach to experimenting using different chemical formulae. 4

He had researched the latest scientific theories, both symbiotic (with fungi) and asymbiotic (with sugars), methods that had been developed by Lewis Knudson and E.A. White of Cornell University, Dr Malcolm Wilson a mycologist at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh University, Professor Wayte at University of Ghent and in Europe by Hans Burgeff and Noel Bernard while he also communicated with other amateur orchidologists to seek their advice.5

He tried a carrot-based recipe from Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1915) who had carried out orchid experiments at Armanvilliers with his gardener Gaston Bultel who had been influenced by Bernard.6

Commercial suppliers such as Charlesworth and Sons had been trialing seed germination and Lionel paid them and others to supply him seed to grow as seedlings in flasks for Exbury.7

He wrote to Colonel Durham at Kew in 1893 saying that he could successfully raise epiphytal orchids, namely Cattleya, Miltonia and Odontoglossum.8 At the Chelsea Show in 1913 a large display of orchids including Cattleya, which had been grown from seed at Exbury, greatly impressed the orchid community. Lionel’s orchids informed his work on the rhododendron collection. As Chair of the Rhododendron Society, he urged his fellow rhododendron fanciers to follow the system of orchid classification for naming rhododendrons in 1910.9

By 1893 Lionel’s collection numbered 28,000 orchids in plant and seedling form, Cymbidium, Odontoglossum, Miltonia, Cattleya, Vandas, Phalaenopsis, Cypripedium, Odontiodas, and even he was unable to keep the collection going with the arrival of World War I. He started to approach buyers in America who had the financial resources to invest in no enemy bombs falling on their glasshouses.10 His untimely death in 1916 charged the orchid collections of the Rothschilds forever. A Ministry of Agriculture edict allowed coal rations to be used to heat the Cymbidium glasshouse throughout the war.

After the war Lionel’s son, Edmund de Rothschild (1895–2009) returned to Exbury and continued to cultivate Cymbidiums and to win RHS awards with his successful cymbidium hybrids. If the whole orchid collection had survived Lionel may well have been as renowned for his orchids as his woodland collections.

Francesca Murray is a BA Hons graduate of King’s College London (1990) and completed her Master’s degree in Garden History at the University of Buckingham in 2011. Her enthusiastic horticultural research for this Master’s topic has led her through many disciplines of garden history and design, plant hunting, science, botany, entomology, floristry, family history, architecture and finance to ensure that her plants to continue to study at PhD level are firmly rooted in the future.

**NOTES**

1 The Windmill Hill Archive. Ferdinand Sander, Reminiscences, 1888–92, p.1. I was taken to see the famous glasshouses of Mrs Lawrence, the mother of Sir Trevor Lawrence, orchid enthusiast and later RHS president and they much impressed me for at Kew’s glass was ‘then unknown.’

2 Cypripedium rothschildianum, named by Lionel as he had both his patron and good client Ferdinand de Rothschild. Later reclassified in 1888 by Stein as Paphiopedilum rothschildianum. For potted Pseudobulb Paphiopedilum rothschildianum. For potted Pseudobulb Paphiopedilum rothschildianum. For potted Pseudobulb Paphiopedilum rothschildianum. For potted Pseudobulb

3 Handwritten notes in red ink on a page margin: ‘I owe this orchid to new to be seen in soprhe character at Gunnersbury Park. The plants... are now blooming abundantly. For them there are fifty-four species of blooms. The late Mr S. Williams once wrote of my tree in that it is a “shy blooming species” but they are hardly a characteristic of those under Mr Reynolds care. They are decidually floriferous.’ It also won a Gold Medal on 5 May 1916 from the RHS Orchid Committee. Thomas Hobbs diary 1909–10. RAL XI. 21

4 Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society. Orchid Committee Minutes, 18 October 1896. ‘In Messrs de Rothschild Gunnersbury House, Acton (Mr J.J. Hudson) Silver gilt flora medal, for a splendid group, consisting of thirty-four plants, bearing together nearly seven hundred flowers. RAL XI. 17/7/1917


6 File, p.14

7 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild, The Gardeners’ Chronicle. 10 April 1917, p.249: ‘Orchids, were perhaps his favourite and several beautiful by hybrid bear his name.’

8 ‘Lord Rothschild showed a life sized photograph of a specimen of Phalaenopsis Schlippei grown in his garden since 1893... bearing eighty– eight flowers.’ Journal of RHS Orchid Committee January 1911, cvii

9 The Gardeners’ Chronicle, 10 December 1914, P.197

10 Orchid Review, 1919, p.7

11 Royal Agricultural Show, 14 August, September 1917


13 The Tring Park orchid collection 1939–1950. RAL XI. 21/3/1/5. An example was Lachnea speciosa grown under Lord Rothschild by the late Major Evelyn de Rothschild. RAL XI. 21/3/1/10

14 Albion of black and white photographs by Marcel Gaucher, Islwyn, from 1862. An example was Lachnea speciosa grown under Lord Rothschild by the late Major Evelyn de Rothschild. RAL XI. 21/3/1/10

15 Using fungi that live at the base of the orchid, therefore ‘mycorrhizal’ association on the fungus and the roots of the orchid to aid germination.


18 The Tring Park orchid collection 1939–1950. RAL XI. 21/3/1/5. An example was Lachnea speciosa grown under Lord Rothschild by the late Major Evelyn de Rothschild. RAL XI. 21/3/1/10

19 Albion of black and white photographs by Marcel Gaucher of native orchids in their own habitat, possibly Ashton Wood. RAL XI. 21/3/1/10

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Kew, 4 October 1913, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

23 RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

24 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Gunnersbury, 1898, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

25 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Gunnersbury, 1898, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

26 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Gunnersbury, 1898, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

27 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Gunnersbury, 1898, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.

28 Lionel of Nathaniel de Rothschild at Gunnersbury, 1898, RAL XI. 21/3/1/6.
Unmasking ‘King John of Portugal’

Fiona McGarel-Groves reveals how the rediscovery of a portrait led to a deeper understanding of the Rothschilds’ early global business activities.

In a small room in the third New Court where, until 2004, the London price of gold was set twice each business day by five representatives from The London Gold Market Fixing Ltd., hung a small series of early nineteenth-century portraits, known as the ‘Crowned Heads’. These heads of state represented five of the countries for which the Rothschild brothers provided government loans in the two decades after the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815).¹ The portraits are identified by small brass labels as the Empress Catherine of Russia, King William of the Netherlands, Emperor Francis of Austria, King Frederick William of Prussia, and King John of Portugal. They now hang together with two other ‘Crowned Heads’ of significance – William IX, the Elector of Hesse, and Andrew Jackson, President of the United States – in a prominent corridor in the present New Court.

The ‘Crowned Heads’ were labelled some time after they were acquired. They were probably presented to Nathan Mayer Rothschild at the times of the various loans, and a 1917 inventory indicates that several of them were hung in the corridor off the main entrance hall of the mansion at Nathan’s estate at Gunnersbury, West London. King John is not mentioned in that inventory and it is unclear where this picture was in 1917. One can only imagine that, after two generations, a member of the family decided to label the portraits so that their subjects would not be forgotten, and that some guesswork was involved. After most of the pictures were correctly identified, the last picture and the last name were put together – erroneously as we now know.

It was established some time ago that the sitter with northern European features, labelled King John of Portugal, was unlikely to be that particular monarch. Known portraits of Dom João VI, King of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves (1767–1826) show him to have been a dark man with coarse facial features, (even accounting for the flattering work of court painters) and to be rather stout. The Portuguese Embassy in London recently described him as an ugly man.²

The correct identification was made possible thanks to a gift to the Archive, made by Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild in 2012, of a collection of nineteenth-century civil decorations, which had no accompanying documentation but were believed to have been awarded to James de Rothschild (1794–1868), founder of the Paris Rothschild house. Research revealed that the orders came from a number of European countries, as well as Turkey and Russia. The decorations have broadly the same citation, being awarded in appreciation for services to the country of origin.

The decorations were examined to establish whether they could be connected with some of the early Rothschild loans. For example, the Prussian loan of five million pounds in 1818 could be related to the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle in the box. King Frederick William III (1770–1840) (one of the Crowned Heads) used this as his highest-ranking royal order, generally awarding it for outstanding service. It is not unreasonable to think that this distinguished order could well have been given to James – and indeed Nathan – for their part in the negotiations for the loan, and perhaps to acknowledge the part the brothers had played in financing Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815.
‘King John’ wears several Iron Cross decorations, known to be Prussian, on his coat. This medieval symbol of the Teutonic Knights was established as largely, but not exclusively, military decoration by King Frederick William III in 1813 during the Napoleonic Wars. ‘King John’ wears the non-combatant version of the medal coupled with the prestigious Order of the Red Eagle, as does King Frederick William in our portrait, which suggested that this man could be a member of the Prussian Royal family, although no likeness could be found. However, he also wears the prestigious Order of the Red Eagle. A search for recipients of the Order of the Red Eagle, and a search of those names to find portraits, eventually revealed that this man was Karl August, Prince von Hardenberg (1750–1822), Prussian statesman and variously Frederick William’s Foreign Minister, Chancellor and plenipotentiary. Why was he sufficiently important to be included among the Crowned Heads?

Hardenberg was essentially a senior civil servant with considerable diplomatic skills and an interest in political reform. King Frederick William II of Prussia (1744–97) made him Cabinet Minister responsible for negotiating peace with France in 1795. On the strength on this, after Frederick William III’s accession in 1797, Hardenberg was appointed Foreign Minister, and then First Minister in 1814. France was then still at war in Europe, and Napoleon’s overwhelming triumph at the Battle of Austerlitz meant that Prussia was compelled into alliance with France in early 1806. Napoleon then insisted Hardenberg be dismissed, knowing him to be a major opponent of France with a considerable influence over the King.
In 1810 Hardenberg returned as Prussian Chancellor. He and the Minister for Trade began a thorough programme of reform, in order to strengthen and modernise Prussia. They concentrated on radical social and political reorganisation: revising the military system, abolishing serfdom, developing municipal institutions and making the civil service and education available to all classes. By the time Napoleon had overreached himself with his 1812 Russian campaign, Hardenberg felt Prussia was ready for war with France.

Hardenberg now had a role within the close and powerful Quadruple Alliance of Prussia, Russia, Austria and Britain at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–18, where he was Prussia’s chief representative. The Congress’s object was to establish long-term peace for Europe, mainly by resisting, and thereby balancing, the main powers. In 1814 the king honoured him with the rank of Prince, for his achievements. The new Kingdom of the Netherlands was represented, as was Portugal, among others at the Congress. Five of these countries are reflected by our Crowned Heads. By 1815 the Rothschilds had raised a Government loan for each of these countries, such was the parlous state of Europe’s finances after years of war, and in 1818 Hardenberg was the first statesman to sanction and negotiate a Government loan with the Rothschilds. He died four years later, in 1822.

Returning again to the mysterious ‘King John’, the Palacio Nacional da Ajuda in Lisbon kindly provided The Rothschild Archive with a digital image, which proves that Dom João looked nothing like the portrait with his name. J.A. Rogers (1885–1966), writer on matters of race, intimates that many of João’s family and ancestors were of African appearance. He attributes this to historic intermarriage during the medieval Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. He quotes the Duchesse d’Abrantès, wife of the French Ambassador to Portugal at the time of João’s Regency, describing in her 1873 memoirs João’s ‘enormous head with its Negro hair, which moreover was quite in harmony with his thick lips, his African nose and the colour of his skin’.

João was Prince Regent from 1799 to 1816 during his mother Queen Maria’s mental illness, and King for a further ten years until his death. In the year that João assumed the Regency, Napoleon attempted to force Portugal to break her alliance with Britain and submit to France, or be invaded. João refused, playing for time as he signed a secret treaty ensuring British help for his court to flee to Brazil. By November 1807 invasion was inevitable and the British navy transported the royal family and an enormous retinue to Brazil. The government was left with a Regency, and a population which could not believe that their ruler had abandoned them.

João was welcomed in his American colony, and quickly set the tone for his reign with an 1808 charter opening Brazil’s ports to trade with friendly nations on favourable terms. This was an important economic and political move as Brazil had previously only traded directly with Portugal. In return for its services to the Royal Family, Britain had negotiated an agreement to receive trade concessions from Brazil, in return for which Britain would endorse Brazilian independence. In fact it was a shoddy device which enabled Britain to manipulate Brazilian imports while paying almost half the duty charged to other countries, and inhibited Brazilian tobacco and sugar markets in competition with Britain’s nearby producers.

Nevertheless, João transformed his chosen capital, Rio de Janeiro, with new buildings, imported luxury goods, and new standards of etiquette and fashion. His enormous retinue of aristocrats, civil servants, professionals, military and religious officials and skilled artisans, underpinned a new national administration. At the same time he nurtured the Bank of Brazil and more than one university, public services and cultural activities, and a new economy, which became the basis for Brazil’s future independence. Brazil effectively ceased to be a colony and became a sovereign nation. Meanwhile, in post-occupation Portugal, the population was starving and many emigrated. The country had effectively become a reluctant British protectorate, and in 1820 the population persuaded their king to return, but as a constitutional monarch. His son Pedro remained in Brazil to become the ruler in 1822.

Both Portugal and Brazil were clients of the London Rothschild house, receiving Government loans in 1815 and 1822 respectively. James’s box of decorations holds the ancient Portuguese Order of the Tower and Sword, an order of knighthood and the pinnacle of the Portuguese honours system. João VI used it to reward services to the Crown by foreigners who were ineligible for other Portuguese orders due to their religion. This is another decoration that could well have been awarded to James and his brothers in acknowledgement of their services in furnishing the government loans.

The search to unmask King John and then discover why Hardenberg was included among the Crowned Heads, leads to a further interesting story. It appears that Nathan was doing business with these countries some years earlier than the various government loans, and that business, which was immensely significant, may well have given those countries the confidence to deal with the Rothschilds in such enormous amounts of money later on.
Northern Europe was in the grip of the Napoleonic Wars in the early years of the century. France’s Continental Blockade made the movement of commodities and money around the Continent almost impossible for those countries which were not under her control. Nathan, who was dealing in specie and bullion in London, had extended his activities into Europe by smuggling by sea where Napoleon had no control. He was moving larger and larger sums successfully and making handsome profits in the process. His youngest brother James was working with him in England and France and together they established an impressive network of agents, dealers and couriers across Europe and as far afield as South America.

Meanwhile, the British Government had committed to financial support of her allies against Napoleon; Austria, Prussia and Russia received regular grants, but the blockade made the acquisition and movement of money increasingly difficult. ‘The war was provoked by Revolutionary France, and Napoleon prompted Britain and other powers in Europe to form coalitions to defend themselves, and it was not until 1813 that they were prepared to go on the offensive. This took enormous amounts of money.’

In 1812 John Herries, Commissary-General to the British Army, responsible for funding both the allies and the Army, noted Nathan’s international financial operations. General Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington) and his Army, were beleaguered in the Iberian peninsula in urgent need of money. In July 1812 Wellesley had written to Earl Bathurst (1760–1842), Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, suggesting he stop depending on the Bank of England for money and employ a private agent to collect and deliver it straight to him. Herries, with government approval, approached Nathan.

Nathan raised the money by his usual methods, and his agents delivered it to Wellesley. This successful operation gave the British Government confidence in Nathan, and Herries appointed him to raise the money for the allies’ subsides. Nathan again managed to deliver enormous amounts to assist the allies, some of whom were in desperate circumstances after twenty years of war. Financial transactions of this size could not go unnoticed, and Herbert Kaplan notes in Nathan Mayer Rothschild and the Creation of a Dynasty, that the British could only hope they would be interpreted as ‘a private speculation.’ Herries now recommended to the Prime Minister and Chancellor that the method of paying the allies be restructured and regularised. In addition, while Wellesley’s army remained in France, ‘a more regular and direct means of funding it’ had to be found, together with ‘a person confidentially entrusted with power to make arrangements to this effect . . . the operations of an exchange agent of great power and extensive connexion, collecting funds regularly, and with constant regards to the interests of England through all the principal exchanges of Europe.’ The model ‘exchange agent’ for the task was Nathan. The Prime Minister and Chancellor approved, the Chancellor wrote to the Foreign Secretary about Nathan ‘... I have not met with any[one] capable of executing any operation on such a scale except those to whom I have referred.’

After Napoleon went into exile in 1814, Herries made even greater use of Nathan as facilitator and paymaster, including using his resources to fund the return of Louis XVIII to France. A year later, Napoleon escaped from prison and raised an army. ‘The threat of a resumption of war against Napoleon meant that Britain and its allies would once again require enormous amounts of money to pay for it. And once again the skills of the Rothschilds would be mobilised.’ The Chancellor wrote with satisfaction to the Foreign Secretary of ‘Herries, who, with his Jew friends, will be our principal instruments in the management.’ Nathan’s huge and complicated machinery again cranked into action as ‘once again, Britain would pay dearly to defeat Napoleon, and, once again, the Rothschilds would become indispensable to the British Government, and even richer because of it.’ After Napoleon’s defeat in 1815, the Congress of Vienna ordered France to pay the Quadruple Alliance 750 million francs in indemnities, to each of the allies in five annual instalments. The Rothschilds were commissioned to manage the transactions for Britain, Russia and Prussia. As with all their other dealings with the British Government and the allies, these transactions were subject to ‘a suitable and sizeable commission.’

Kaplan believes that ‘the contributions the Rothschilds made to a victorious British policy on the Continent were, when examined closely, actually far greater than the myths grown up about them.’ For a short while Nathan and his brothers stood at the centre of Europe’s tumultuous events, with success or failure truly depending on them. It is notable that they confined their remuneration to that ‘suitable and sizeable commission’ without request for personal gain, social realignment, or political favour apart from some petitioning to Hardenberg for Jewish rights in Frankfurt, when at the Council of Vienna in 1815.

The discovery of the identity of a portrait is a researcher’s delight. For that subject to be unexpectedly distinguished, and for him to lead directly to the true breadth of Nathan’s astonishing financial muscle in Europe at such a critical time, was an unlooked for and exciting ride.

The story has added another dimension to the Rothschild Crowned Heads, helping us to a greater understanding of their importance to Rothschild history. This adds the question: did Nathan Rothschild receive a portrait of King John? If he did, what became of it? Does it yet survive in a family collection somewhere? More research in the archives is in order.

Fiona McGarel-Groves has worked at The Rothschild Archive since 2004. A graduate of the Open University, she completed her MA in the History of London at Birkbeck, University of London.

NOTES
1 www.rothschildarchive.org
2 Information communicated privately.
5 Ibid., p. 37.
6 Ibid., p. 87.
7 Ibid., p. 104.
8 Ibid., p. 105.
9 Ibid., p. 106.
10 Ibid., p. 107.
11 Ibid., p. 109.
12 Ibid., p. 110.
13 Ibid., p. 109.
‘There are three types of men’:
Lionel de Rothschild and The Jewish War Services Committee, 1915–1919

As many countries mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, Archivist Justin Cavenelis-Frost considers the role of New Court as a recruiting office for Jewish soldiers, and remembers the ultimate sacrifice the English Rothschild family paid in the conflict.

The Rothschild family, who had helped to create ‘modern’ Europe through their businesses and marriages linking the continent’s influential families, were deeply affected by the crisis of World War I. Like royalty, they were forced to abjure family solidarity and to give their loyalty to the countries of their adoption: England, France, Austria and Germany. By 1915, 70 million military personnel had been mobilised in one of the largest wars in history. Over a million men from across the British Empire lost their lives on active service between 1914 and 1918, and many thousands more suffered physical injuries and mental scars that affected the rest of their lives. The war was the catalyst for major political and social changes, and by the war’s end, the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires had ceased to exist, and the map of Europe had been re-drawn.

‘There are three types of men: those who hear the call and obey; those who delay; and – the others. To which do you belong?’ proclaimed a 1915 British recruiting poster. Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1882–1942) was certainly one of the first ‘types of men’; clearly hearing the call and, believing in the rightness of the cause and the necessity to go to war to protect the freedoms and future of Europe, he contributed to the war effort in very practical ways. Lionel was the eldest of the three sons of Leopold de Rothschild (1845–1917). He was very close to his brothers Evelyn Achille (1886–1917) and Anthony Gustav (1887–1961). Educated at Harrow and Trinity College Cambridge, Lionel took his place as a partner at New Court on 1 April 1915. In his later years, Lionel described himself rather self-deprecatingly as ‘a gardener by profession, a banker by hobby’, but this underestimates his achievements. As a young man he was adventurous, with a natural scientific curiosity, and he was a pioneer of early motoring and photography. The young Lionel spent his summers at the family’s country estate at Ascott in Buckinghamshire, the area where many Rothschilds had settled, and where Lionel would later serve as MP for The Vale of Aylesbury from 1910 to 1923. When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Lionel was already a Major in the Royal Buckinghamshire Regiment. His brothers Evelyn and Anthony immediately joined the British Army, also serving in the 1/1st Royal Buckinghamshire Yeomanry (Royal Bucks Hussars). Lionel, much to his frustration and regret, was not to see active service. Continuation of the business at home was as vital to the war effort as military service. As the most senior of his generation of English male Rothschilds, he reluctantly gave in to pressure to remain with the family firm at New Court, assisting his two uncles, Nathaniel (‘Natty’) 1st Lord Rothschild (1840–1915) and Alfred de Rothschild (1842–1918), and his father Leopold, who by
1914 was in poor health.11 The decision was given added force by no less than the King himself, who is said to have personally requested that Lionel remain at New Court to direct the affairs of the London House.13 It proved a wise course of action, for in March 1916, Natty died.

Lionel's father Leopold had many personal contacts with the armed forces. 17 Before any official recognition of the issues of Jewish recruitment, the New Court Rothschilds had supported the enlistment of volunteers. In May 1915, Leopold provided the preface for the pamphlet 'Jews and the War' which had been issued by 'The Central Committee for National Patriotic Organisations'.18 He called upon Jewish men 'to realise their duty as Jews…[and join] in unfaltering defence of the weak, and in vindication of those principles of justice, humanity and international good-faith which they, as Jews, have so much reason to cherish, and from which they have still so much to hope.'19 Under Lionel's direction, a City recruiting office was established at New Court, probably in October 1915. Reporting on its opening, The Jewish World explained that 'Jews wishing to enlist there will be sent to suitable regiments…'20

The site of operations of the committee was New Court, and the Committee became known colloquially as 'Rothschild's Recruiting Office'.23 The honorary secretary was Samuel Stephany, a senior clerk at the Bank.24 Records of the committee survive in the papers held by the Archive, and a minute book, vouchers and receipts record its work.25 The committee lost its legal status in 1919.26

Given the family's close associations with Buckinghamshire, they were inevitably involved with the local Volunteer and Territorial units, and as leading lay members of Anglo-Jewry, it seemed natural that Rothschild energies to support the war should be directed towards issues of the recruitment of Jews, and men from Buckinghamshire. In 1914, Jewish recruitment was a serious concern. A high proportion of British Jews were either foreign-born or had foreign-born parents, and anti-German feelings in Britain often did not distinguish between Germans and persons with 'foreign' names. At the start of the war, there were reports of Jews being turned down at recruiting centres. In November 1915, The Jewish Chronicle reported cases of recruiting officers saying 'Lord Kitchener does not want any more Jews in the Army' and 'We are not enlisting Jews'.15 There were accusations that Jews were not joining, and, on the Jewish side, complaints that they were being rejected at the recruiting offices. There was also confusion about the legal position of foreigners, and local recruiting officers were not consistent in their actions. Before conscription came into force with the passing of The Military Service Act in January 1916, many Jews had volunteered for service. Prior to the war there were an estimated thousand Jews in the British forces; by 1916, the number of Jews on active service has been estimated at about 10,000.27

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The committee was established with 'the purpose of promoting the enlistment of Jews and of helping the military authorities with their work'.28 The committee was appointed by 'General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, Officers Commanding Districts, Secretaries to Territorial Force Associations, and Recruiting Officers' announced the formation of a central Jewish recruiting committee 'composed of gentlemen who are in close touch with Jewish questions and Jewish social life in this country.'29 The committee was established with 'the purpose of promoting the enlistment of Jews and of helping the military authorities with their work.30

On 18 December 1915, the situation concerning Jewish recruitment was clarified by the War Office. It recognised that although many Jews had signed up, there were large numbers of eligible men who had not yet enlisted. Circular 20/Gen. no./415 (a.g. 20/a.), issued to 'General Officers Commanding-to-Chief, Officers Commanding Districts, Secretaries to Territorial Force Associations, and Recruiting Officers' announced the formation of a central Jewish recruiting committee 'composed of gentlemen who are in close touch with Jewish questions and Jewish social life in this country.'22 The committee was established with 'the purpose of promoting the enlistment of Jews and of helping the military authorities with their work.32

The site of operations of the committee was New Court, and the Committee became known colloquially as 'Rothschild's Recruiting Office'. The honorary secretary was Samuel Stephany, a senior clerk at the Bank. Records of the committee survive in the papers held by the Archive, and a minute book, vouchers and receipts record its work. The committee lost its legal status in 1919. Given the family's close associations with Buckinghamshire, they were inevitably involved with the local Volunteer and Territorial units, and as leading lay members of Anglo-Jewry, it seemed natural that Rothschild energies to support the war should be directed towards issues of the recruitment of Jews, and men from Buckinghamshire. In 1914, Jewish recruitment was suffering. The committee met regularly, initially every three or four days, and to discuss the placing of recruiting advertisements, writing to synagogue leaders and persons involved in the local community to discuss the placing of recruiting advertisements, writing to synagogue leaders and persons involved in the local community.
As the war continued, the committee's remit widened to consider questions of the religious and physical welfare of serving Jewish soldiers. The Visitation Committee of the United Synagogue was responsible for the spiritual needs of Jews in public institutions. When Jews were officially recognised as a distinct religious body in the British army from 1889, the United Synagogue decided to extend its activities to serving members of the British forces, applying to the War Office to appoint a Jewish Forces Chaplain. Rabbi Francis L. Cohen was the first appointed in 1892, succeeded in 1904 by Reverend Michael Adler (1869–1944). In January 1911, Adler was sent to France to assess the need for a Jewish chaplain at the Front. His subsequent report to the War Office showed a desperate urgency, and he returned to France. In March 1916, the Jewish War Services Committee invited two members of the Visitation Committee to join them, and began to lend its support to the holding of Sabbath services for Jewish soldiers, and petitions by Jewish soldiers to the War Office to request that they ‘be put to military work that enables them to observe their religious rites’. Through the efforts of the committee, chaplains, beginning with Reverend Adler, were able to provide Jewish troops with some small measure of comfort, the first time that Jewish chaplains had formed part of the British Army on active service. Reverend Adler became known as ‘The Chaplain in the Trenches’ for his war work. In his appointments diary, he recalls the occasion on 11 August 1916 when he ‘met a party of fifty newly-arrived Jewish soldiers belonging to the 1/1st Bucks Battalion - near a village called Bouzincourt, outside Albert. As the place was being bombarded, all troops were ordered into the open, and we found a vacant space in a cornfield where a square was formed and a brief service held.’

By early 1916, the committee was considering a wide range of matters. In February, it assisted the West Central Jewish Working Men’s Club to open a hostel for Jewish soldiers passing through London. The hostel had 30 beds, and one night’s lodging and breakfast was free, a longer stay being charged at cost price. In the summer, the chairman announced that under the scheme of enlisting friendly aliens, tribunals would be set up for the purpose of hearing appeals against military service. In October the committee considered a letter from the Chief Rabbi asking for arrangements to be made for clergymen to visit enemy prisoners of war. As the war entered its fourth year in 1917, the expansion of the field of conflict and the great need of the troops for spiritual sustenance led to the full unification of the Visitation Committee of the United Synagogue and the Jewish War Services Committee. Throughout 1918, the committee concerned itself with matters of the welfare of Jewish soldiers such as the supply of kosher food and the issue of Passover leave. The last meeting of the committee, on 6 May 1919 was after the Armistice when the final accounts record a deficit of £435, and the committee agreed to ask previous donors to renew their support to cover outstanding expenses. The final acts of the committee were to write various letters of thanks and to print 50,000 copies of Reverend Adler’s pamphlet on the War.

Working documents from the Jewish War Services Committee, formed in 1915. Above, agenda for a meeting held at New Court, 18 April 1917 and far left, a recruitment circular, signed by Leopold de Rothschild, January 1916. View of the second New Court building (1860–1962). It was from here that Lionel co-ordinated his war work. RAL 005/207
Lionel's brother Anthony served his country with distinction in the Buckinghamshire Yeomanry, was wounded at Gallipoli, and mentioned in Despatches. He ended the war as a Major with the General Staff. In 1917, the family (already mourning the death of Leopold in May) suffered a shattering blow, when, Evelyn, Lionel and Anthony's brother, was badly wounded on 13 November in the cavalry charge at El Mughab in the Palestine campaign and died four days later in the Citadel Hospital, Cairo. A superb horseman, Evelyn was mobilised with his regiment on the outbreak of war, and in August 1914 had been promoted to Captain, leaving for Egypt in April 1915. Sent to Gallipoli, he was temporarily in command of the Regiment, but after three months was wounded and subsequently invalided out to the base. He was present at both Battles of Gaza, and was promoted to the rank of major in March 1917. In Evelyn's obituary, the officer commanding the Bucks Yeomanry described the battle: 'The Regiment was taking part in a mounted charge on the Turkish infantry, who were very strongly posted on some high ground, El Mughab[ri]. I attacked with the Regiment in column of

squadrons, and Evelyn was with the 2nd Squadron and was a take command of the two leading Squadrons on reaching the objective. We had some two miles of open country to cross, which was fairly swept by machine-gun and rifle fire. It was about half-way across this plain that Evelyn was struck down by a bullet. After all his death was a glorious one, killed when changing at the head of his men of Bucks'. Tragically, Neil Primrose, the son of Hannah Rothschild (1851–1899) who had married the Earl of Rosebery, and cousin of Lionel and his brothers was also killed in Palestine within days.33 These tragic losses must have given Lionel's war work an added urgency and poignancy.

The Jewish War Services Committee fulfilled the need to deal with the issues of Jewish wartime recruitment. As the early patriotic fervour of the war diminished, the committee played a valuable role in providing succour to serving Jewish troops. These measures must have offered some comfort to counter the horrors of the battlefield. The number of men killed in the war who enlisted at New Court was 75 to which can be added a further 67 who enlisted at the neighbouring St. Swithin's Lane recruiting office, totalling 142. After the war, Field Marshal Earl Haig praised 'the loyalty with which British Jews of every class came forward to fight for the country of their adoption and for the great human ideals which they shared with their Christian comrades in arms'.34 When it became clear that the war was ending, the crucial task of rehabilitating Jewish soldiers into civilian life began, and the Rothschilds were at the forefront in remembering the fallen and helping the living through the creation of a 'Living' memorial.35 Under the leadership of Robert Waley Cohen, and supported by Lionel and Anthony, a Jewish Memorial Council was established to support Jewish education and religious training.36 Lionel was awarded an OBE in the Military Division in 1917.37 In 1919, he inherited his Uncle Alfred's Buckinghamshire estate, Halton, and began to develop his estate at Edgware, Hampshire.38 On 5 December 1920, Anthony de Rothschild unveiled the War Memorial in the churchyard of All Saints Church at Wing, Buckinghamshire honouring his brother and his Wing comrades. In 1931, Anthony named his new son Evelyn, in memory of his fallen brother.39 Lionel died on 24 January 1942, three days after his sixtieth birthday. The great upheaval of the war changed the map of Europe. During the war, intercontinental migration dwindled, but once the war was over, hundreds of thousands of Jews began leaving Europe. In the 1920s and 1930s, Rothschilds at New Court, led by Anthony and his wife Yvonne, again provided significant resources and support, assisting Jewish refugees from Europe. In December 1938, Anthony was appointed chairman of the Emigration (Planning) Committee, a subcommittee of the Council for German Jewry, which helped many Jews leave continental Europe to safety. The Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation was co-ordinated from New Court. Anthony led N M Rothschild & Sons as Senior Partner from 1941 until shortly before his death in 1961.

Justin Casavant-Forst is Archivist at The Rothschild Archive. He is a member of the Board of Trustees, the Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland.

NOTES

1 This article concerns activities of the English family. See the article by Natalie Bruil on p.4 for details of the family in the rest of Europe.
4 Although a resurgence of imperialism was an underlying cause, the immediate trigger for war was the assassination in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. This triggered a diplomatic crisis and within weeks, the major powers were at war. See Keegan, The First World War.
In his article about the Jewish War Services Committee earlier in this Renius, Justin Cavenliss-Frost outlined the role that various members of the Rothschild family in Britain played during World War I. It can easily be imagined that the outbreak and effects of the war were devastating for the family. The Europe which they had helped to build in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars a century before was irrevocably changed. Most of the older generation did not live to see the conclusion of the conflict, but feared its immediate and long-term impacts, both for their extended family and for the next generation who were to lead the business into the new world of the twentieth century.

The sense of dread and fear that must have pressed down on everyone in Europe is palpable in a letter sent from Edward de Rothschild (1808–1949) to his uncle, Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild (1840–1901). The letter, written two days before the declaration of war between Germany and France, serves as a stark reminder of the short passage of time between the Franco-Prussian war and August 1914. The Rothschilds on the continent were preparing to live in occupied lands again.

Time is on our side: the Rothschild family in World War I

Natalie Broad highlights the role played by members of the Rothschild family in Europe during the conflict that divided the continent.
Edouard’s cousin, Robert (1880–1946) served as an interpreter. He was twice awarded the Croix de Guerre and was mentioned in Despatches. Together with other French officers he attended the 1914 Christmas dinner of the 8th Division, British Expeditionary Forces, to which he was seconded. Whilst Robert was dispatched on classified missions his wife, Nelly (1886–1945) nursed at their property at Laversine, which had been converted into a hospital. James (1878–1957) and his brother Maurice (1881–1957) were both attached to the British Army as liaison officers. Henri (1872–1947) turned over his car factory to the production of ambulances. Having witnessed some of the horrors of the injuries suffered by servicemen in the trenches he developed a burns unit which could travel by ambulance right to the battle zone front. He also worked on devising airtight containers for the men’s rations to prevent contamination. Henri’s son, James (1896–1984) served in the French air force as a combat pilot and both his wife Mathilde (1874–1926) and his mother, the Frankfurt born Laura-Thérèse (1847–1931), nursed during the conflict. 4

The Austrian cousins who were eligible also signed up at the outbreak of war. Three brothers, Alphonse (1878–1942), Louis (1882–1955) and Eugène (1884–1976) fought for their country in several capacities. Louis was left in charge of the business built by Salomon von Rothschild (1774–1855) in Vienna, whilst Alphonse was sent as an Oberstleutnant to the Italian front, where his brother Eugène was also serving. Eugène found time to keep his family informed of his activities. On 18 May 1915 he sent a picture postcard of himself standing in a trench [see below] to his sister Valentine (1886–1969), writing:

I wish you all the best on your birthday and hope that you receive this one card in your 29th year! Things are going well for me, as you can see, and I have a lot of things to do.

Eugène’s levity in his notes to his sister disguises the tensions of the stalemate at the Italian front for most of the war where there were heavy casualties at every attack. Though Austria shared in the humiliation of defeat in 1918, the three brothers were no doubt thankful to return to their families, their business and to their European cousins.
Scenes from the Western Front from a file associated with Robert de Rothschild which includes private documents, such as travel passes, allowing access within the British Army occupied areas, 1914. R.A. 000/736
Research into the experiences of so many members of the Rothschild family during World War I has allowed us to re-examine many of the collections at the Archive and to link together material which reached us from diverse sources. A comprehensive account of the family’s lives and description of the sources is available on the Archive’s website.1

Natalie Broad joined the staff at The Rothschild Archive in 2009 as Archive Assistant. She assumed the role of Assistant Archivist in May 2011 after completing her Postgraduate Diploma in Archives and Records Management at University College London. She gained her Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Winchester and has a continuing interest in this area.

NOTES

1 The title of this article is taken from a letter written by Winston Churchill to Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild in January 1915. RRO 100/348/12. The text is based on a longer piece in the Rothschild Pensioners’ Newsletter published in London.

2 Paris 1st Aug 1914. My dear Uncle, Forty four years ago! my poor dear mother embarked with us children in times just as tragic as these we are experiencing and which now necessitate the departure of my dear wife and my dear children. I entrust them to you, and may God protect them. Believe me, my dear Uncle, your very affectionate, Edouard. RRO 100/122/31.

3 Thanks to Caroline Poulain, curator at the Municipal Library of Dijon for information on menus from World War I and to Gisèle Kaiser for assistance with the interpretation. Further examples of menus can be found on the websites www.patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/ and www.centenaire.org/fr/tresors-darchives/fonds-publiques/bibliotheques/archives/cuisine-de-guerre-menus-de-la-bibliotheque


5 www.rothschildarchive.org/exhibitions/rothschilds_and_the_first_world_war/
Readers of previous issues of this Review may remember that the first visitor to the Archive’s new Reading Room at New Court was Leopold de Rothschild who was then in his sixth decade at the bank. His death some months after this visit was a cause of great sadness to so many: his family, his many friends, business associates, colleagues at the bank and fellow musicians and railway enthusiasts. In the last issue the acquisition by the Archive of the papers of Mr Leo, as he was most widely known, was recorded in the notes about principal accessions so many: his family, his many friends, business associates, colleagues at the bank and fellow American countries, leading the bank’s business expansion in Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela and Chile in particular. His files record the business trips he made and chart the development of many enduring relationships with business houses in the region. In London he chaired The British-Venezuelan Society & Chamber of Commerce and was closely involved in the bank’s financing of the Rio-Niterói Bridge in Brazil, a product of two loans to the country organised in the 1960s.

He had many external business interests. Like his great uncle, Alfred de Rothschild, Mr Leo served as a director of the Bank of England between 1970 and 1983. In 1969 he helped to found and chaired Rothschild Intercontinental Bank, a partnership with the National Provincial Bank, which then formed partnerships with other Rothschild financial houses, Banque Lambert, Pierson, Heldring & Pierson and banks in US cities.

These files offer a lesson in the development of communication methods since he began his working life. From the first file—hand-written letters of congratulations from friends and City associates on his partnership—to the print-outs of emails and voice-mail messages, taking in typed letters, telexes and faxes on thermal paper. An early task, of course is to preserve the content of these evanescent formats.

Supplementing the written record are some audio-visual materials, recordings of interviews given to radio music programmes and his own account of the building of the Exbury Gardens Railway, each requiring its own particular conservation attention. To add to the record are the transcripts of oral history interviews conducted with the staff of the Archive and his own notes about his life.

These files demonstrate the balance of a full life as they record Mr Leo’s engagement with many philanthropic and cultural organisations. He sang for 50 years with the Bach Choir and was its President. His involvement with The Countess of Munster Musical Trust, Glyndebourne, English National Opera, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Royal College of Music and many more musical institutions is meticulously recorded in his papers.

Railways were a major passion in his life. With the help of his life-long friend, architect Sir James Dunbar-Nasmuth, he created the Exbury Gardens Steam Railway. Films and photographs of this much-cherished project will be preserved alongside the papers.

Until the records are released for research, they will rest in the Archive alongside the hundreds of files recording the history of the Rothschild business in the second half of the twentieth century and the life of one who made such a contribution to its success.

NOTES
1 The papers have been accessioned with references Kal.001/1926, 1949 and 1967.
2 In 1999 Jean Neal’s widow, Piers, passed on to Mr Leo for deposit with the Archive some of her papers relating to the time she worked at the bank. Kal.001/1971.
3 A short documentary about the June 2014 world premieres of ‘Psalms for Leo’ composed by Jonathan Dove is available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=VBIxUyvAeMI.
The Rothschild Reserves Archive

Archives of the survey conducted between 1931-1954 by The Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR).

The SPNR (founded by Charles de Rothschild) conducted the first ever national survey of wildlife sites in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The resultant documentation for 54 sites (which were to become The Rothschild Reserves) was stored in Rothschild Bank blue envelopes, usually contain a map showing the area in question and relevant correspondence. The archive remained in the offices of the late Leopold de Rothschild (later renamed The Wildlife Trusts). In 2013, the survey maps were digitised and are available at: www.wildlifetrusts.org/about/archive.

A collection of letters from the archives of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. The letters relate to Lionel de Rothschild (1894-1941) and his work with the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, when George Forrest died whilst on a plant hunting expedition in China. The letters refer to bringing back his seed collections to the UK.


The papers document innovative experiments to cultivate orchids at the Royal Mint Refinery and contain receipt books, lists of plants, correspondence, catalogues and display cards from flower shows. There is also a typescript headed 'Copy of Baron Edmond de Rothschild's procedures for the aseptic germination of orchids'.

Correspondence between Dame Miriam Rothschild and Professor Duanne Edwards, (then editor of the Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society) concerning the article 'Cannabis sativa: volatile compounds from pollen and entine male and female plants of two varieties, Northern Lights and Hawaiian Indica'.

Collection of books and exhibition catalogues relating to the life of Jacqueline Patigorsky (nee Rothschild), her husband and son.

Estate records

Estate papers and deeds from Ascott House. An extensive collection of documents relating to the development of the Ascott Estate from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.
Artefacts

Two war memorials recording the names of the staff of N M Rothschild & Sons who served in World War I and World War II. The first memorial, in wood, was in place in the second New Court building, which was demolished in 1962. When the third New Court building was opened in 1965 a new memorial, in marble, was positioned in the entrance hall.

Samples of plates and bowls from Rothschild family dinner services, many with the monogram RR (Robert de Rothschild, 1880–1946) or GR (Gustave de Rothschild, 1829–1911). Most of the plates are French porcelain, late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, made by Jacquel in Paris and Pillivuyt, Mehun sur Yèvre, Cher and J V Heillard, Bordeaux and Sèvres.

Metal safe, formerly in the offices of de Rothschild Frères at rue Lafitte, Paris.

Marble bust of Baron James de Rothschild (1792–1868).

Two watercolours by Eugène Lami (1800–90), one left unfinished, featuring Gustave de Rothschild and his daughters Juliette and Lucie. One of the watercolours was given to Lucie de Rothschild by the artist on the occasion of her wedding to Baron Lambert.

— Above — James G. McMullan (fl. 1826–72)

Portrait of Annie and Constance de Rothschild, 1860, oil on canvas. The painting has been placed with The Rothschild Archive on permanent loan by the trustees of the Anthony Hall, Aston Clinton, where it has been since the early decades of the twentieth century.

RHS awards won by Lionel de Rothschild for orchids and cymbidiums.  

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