



THE ROTHSCHILD ARCHIVE
Review of the year April 1999 – March 2000





The Rothschild Archive Trust

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INTRODUCTION

Emma Rothschild, Chairman of the Rothschild Archive Trust

The inauguration of the new Rothschild Archive premises, which took place in the Insurance Hall at New Court in May 2000, marked the culmination of an extraordinary year for the Archive. The formation in 1999 of the Rothschild Archive Trust, and the gift to the Trust, by N M Rothschild & Sons Limited, of the materials which constitute the Rothschild Archive, have secured the future of the Archive as a place of scholarship and research. The Trust thanks the Board of N M Rothschild and its Chairman, Evelyn de Rothschild, for this truly remarkable act of generosity.

The Rothschild Archive is the outcome of two centuries of history. The work of writing, filing, packing and numbering, which started in or near the New Court premises nearly 200 years ago, continuing in Frankfurt, Paris and Vienna, through times of war, crisis and economic boom, has itself been an extraordinary collective enterprise on the part of many thousands of people. Rothschilds have been collectors of almost everything, including papers, and the survival of the Archive owes a great deal to this instinct. My late father, Victor, was deeply engaged with the Archive during his period in the Bank, as was my brother Amschel. The Trust's collaboration with French and Austrian Rothschilds is already flourishing. The Archive is also indebted to successive professional archivists at New Court. In its present form it is in an important sense the creation of Vic Gray, the Director of the Archive, an exceptional scholar and diplomat, who comes from the public sector to the magnificent premises in the Insurance Hall.

The richness and depth of the Archive's holdings are evident to many tens of thousands of readers of Niall Ferguson's book, *The World's Banker: The History of the House of Rothschild*. The study makes brilliant use of private, uninhibited, sometimes quasi-encrypted correspondence between the Rothschilds, their wives and their children, throughout the 19th century. There is far more material yet to be used. The Archive consists of almost 2 million documents, in almost every European language, taking up more than a kilometre of shelving and covering the entire period from 1800 to 1970. The Guide to the Archive is available as a publication and on the Worldwide Web, at www.rothschildarchive.org.

The Rothschilds have been described by Miriam Rothschild as the first European Union. One of the important challenges for economic history in the early 21st century will be to become a global or globalised history. It must be more than a history of national economies and the relationships between nations of trade or migration or investment. It will be a history of individuals and institutions and ideas which themselves actually belonged to several different national cultures. The Archive has an immense potential in relation to these new challenges, and to many others.

Niall Ferguson in his book refers to a document of 1810, in which Mayer Amschel specifically denied all access by his wife and daughter to the 'books and correspondence' of the firm. I am delighted, as his great-great-great-great granddaughter, to have been so closely involved in the extraordinary step which has been taken in opening access to these books and correspondence to the public and to the world. The Rothschild Archive Trust expects that the Archive will in the future be a genuinely and increasingly international resource. We look forward to a great next century.