

Review of the year

The Rothschild Archive Trust

In August 1999, the Board of Directors of N M Rothschild & Sons Limited formally transferred to the Rothschild Archive Trust the ownership of the archives of the Bank for the whole of the period from its formation in the early 19th century to 1970.

Ever since Nathan Mayer Rothschild arrived in England from his native Frankfurt the written record of the ventures and achievements of Nathan, his descendants and their worldwide network of agents had slowly accrued and had been cared for – with varying degrees of conscientiousness – by generations of clerks.

The recognition by Victor, 3rd Lord Rothschild of the historical significance of what had thus built up, piece by piece, day by day, led to the decision in 1978 to attempt the arranging and preparation of the Archive as a historical resource.

Two decades later, with that preliminary work complete, the creation of the Archive Trust and the gift of the Bank's archives marks the completion of one phase and the start of a new chapter in the life of the Archive. Under the aegis of the Trustees, the long-term future of the Archive will be planned and a programme of initiatives put into place to ensure that its potential as an important resource for the scholarly world is realised. The Trustees will also be seeking to enhance the Archive with the addition both of archive material relating to the family and its many diverse activities and of a range of supporting reference material: publications, images and copies of documents held in other archives and libraries around the world.

In this they will be continuing and building on work already begun. The Archive already boasts series of papers relating to Rothschild houses, art collections, scientific and literary endeavours and, of course, businesses, across a number of countries. The firm intention is to earn and achieve for the Archive recognition as an

international centre for research into the family, its activities and impact.

The Rothschild Archive Trust is a charitable body the objectives of which are “to advance education, for the public benefit, by the preservation and maintenance of the books, manuscripts, letters, accounts, financial records and other papers which together form the historical archive of N M Rothschild & Sons Limited; and to make them available for study by ... scholars and other persons”.

The Trust will continue to enjoy the support of the Board of N M Rothschild & Sons Limited, through the provision of premises, facilities and staff.

A new home for the Archive

In the autumn of 1999 the Rothschild Archive took up occupation of impressive new premises in New Court, St Swithin's Lane, London, the address of N M Rothschild & Sons, the London merchant bank, since its foundation in the early 19th century.



A corner of the new environmentally controlled archive store

The new facilities have been built to the highest technical specifications, environmentally controlled to maintain constant temperature and humidity and thus to minimise the fluctuations which hasten paper decay. Two independent detection systems constantly cross-check the atmosphere in the store for the early warnings of either fire or damp.

The store is fitted with mobile shelving capable of housing the records of the Bank from the earliest times to 1970 and with sufficient room to ensure the expansion of the archive for the foreseeable future.

The Reading Room is also well equipped for modern research methods. Up to nine researchers are able to work simultaneously and each work position can accommodate a lap-top computer or other electric or electronic equipment.

For the first time, researchers have open access to many of the Archive's key research databases and to a body of microfilm copies of Rothschild material from other archives and libraries around

the world, which will be regularly enhanced by new acquisitions.

The new facilities provide a secure base from which the staff of the Archive can work confidently to enlarge the collections and to develop new resources to improve access for researchers in the years to come.

The year's work in the archive

The move of any archive into new premises is a time-consuming operation. It is crucial that each book and box of papers is assigned a new and precise position; once misplaced, recovery can be difficult. In August 1999 a total of 2990 volumes and 5312 boxes were successfully relocated to their new homes in the Archive's new premises in St Swithin's Lane.

At the same time, the creation of the Rothschild Archive Trust, with its objective of exploring more fully the research potential of the Archive, has given a new impetus to the programme of describing the Archive's contents which is at the heart of progress towards accessibility.

Cataloguing

The Archive houses almost two million individual pieces of paper, each potentially capable of revealing unique information. To connect the individual researcher with the paper or papers which answer his or her questions requires, ideally, that each item is fully described, its significance revealed. Of course, not every piece of paper is of equal potential interest; many are routine, even humdrum. The first task of the team of archivists is to identify which areas are more likely to be productive in research terms.

In order to do this, a three-stage programme is in place. Starting with the published description of each group or type of records as a first and unavoidable step, decisions can then be made as to which of these groups merit further attention. The description in greater detail of the contents of these groups constitutes the second stage, taken in order of identified priority. Finally, if time permits, each paper in the group can be



The new Reading Room of the Rothschild Archive



individually described. As this process unfolds, researchers become less and less dependent upon intuition or exploration to locate the items they need and more able to draw on published description.

The Archive this year moved towards the completion of the first phase. In May 2000, the results of that work were published as the Guide to the Rothschild Archive, available both as a publication and as a searchable resource on the Archive's website, launched simultaneously (www.rothschildarchive.org).

Work has also begun on the second phase: the more detailed description of groups defined as being potentially "research-rich". First priority is being given to the letters of some of the Rothschilds' more important agents, who constituted the information network on which the Bank's investment and development decisions were made.

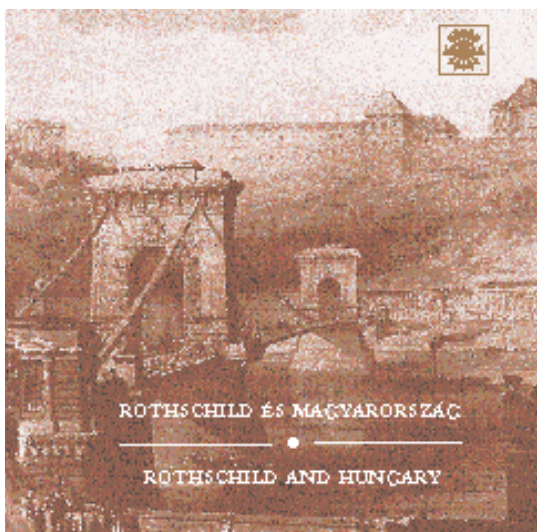
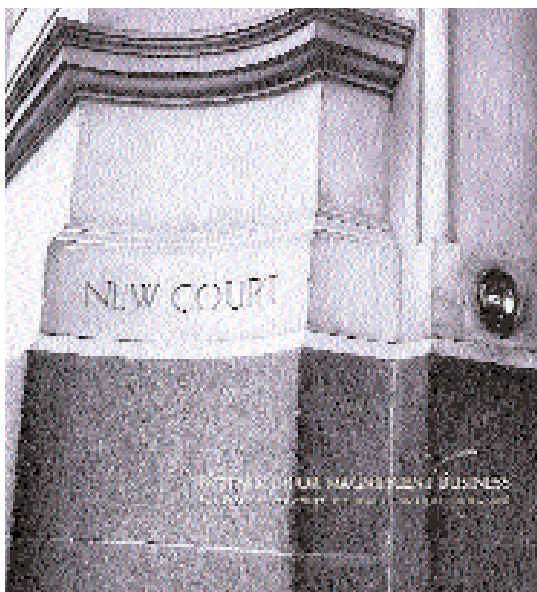
The pilot project in this area focuses on the firm of Weisweiler and Bauer who acted for Rothschilds from their base in Madrid for much of the 19th century. The task of describing their letters to the Rothschilds was begun in earnest in February and a description of the first fruits of the project is given later in this Review (page 15).

Simultaneous with this approach, another key objective has been recognised by the Trustees in the shape of the transcription and translation of the series of Judendeutsch letters of the five Rothschild brothers in the years between 1814 and 1868. Progress on the pilot project for this work is also described later in the Report (page 13).

Publication

At a different and more general level, publication activity led to the appearance during the year of two booklets on aspects of Rothschild history. Designed primarily for use within the N M Rothschild Group, they do nevertheless provide useful introductions to more serious study. The first, *Rothschild and Hungary*, gives a brief account of the Bank's involvement with that country from 1849. The principal focus is on the building of

the Széchenyi Bridge connecting Buda and Pest, for which Salomon von Rothschild was a major financier. The second is an account of the three buildings which have occupied the New Court



site in St Swithin's Lane since Nathan Mayer Rothschild first moved there in 1809. Publication coincided with the completion of work on the new building on the eastern side of St Swithin's Lane which now houses, among other Rothschild functions, The Rothschild Archive.

Work meanwhile has proceeded, in collaboration with Lionel de Rothschild, on the first revision of the Rothschild family tree since 1988, for publication later in the year.

Acquisitions

Among acquisitions received during the year and listed at the end of the Review (page 22), an album of some 350 photographs by Eugène Disdéri, of the Rothschild family and associates in the 1860s, was an unexpected and valuable addition to the collections. This is described in more detail by Melanie Aspey on page 21.

Equally unexpected was the receipt from Moscow of five files relating to the business and political affairs in the 1930s of Maurice de Rothschild. Though their content is not of major significance, their transfer to the Archive marks the completion of the return of French family papers seized by the Nazis in 1940 and taken into custody by Russian forces at the end of the War. The return of some 1,400 files from the Centre for Historico-Documentary Collections in Moscow was achieved through the good offices of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Papers of Maurice de Rothschild recently returned from Moscow

Another reminder of the impact of the 2nd World War on the family is an inventory of the art collections of the Viennese branch compiled by the Nazis at the time of their seizure and, in part, marked to indicate their proposed destinations. The inventory forms one of a group of three, dating from 1906, 1934 and 1939, relating to the Viennese family's art and furniture which have been donated to the Archive this year by Mrs Betty Looram.

Research in the Archive

The preparations for the move of the Archive and the actual move itself left research room facilities unavailable for a large part of 1999. Since the Reading Room was opened at the beginning of 2000, we have, however, seen a return of researchers investigating a very wide range of projects based entirely or in part on the collection.

Professor Herbert Kaplan of Philadelphia continued his research into the foundations of Nathan Rothschild's financial success, focusing on correspondence between the five Rothschild brothers and their European contacts. Stewart Hasted, in preparing a work on the detail of events surrounding the battle of Waterloo, has sought evidence on the celebrated story of the arrival at New Court of the news of Wellington's victory at Waterloo 24 hours in advance of the Government's own courier.

George Ireland began research for a book on the sons of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, focusing initially on the letters of Charlotte, Baroness Lionel de Rothschild written mainly to her son, Leo. Charlotte's correspondence provides a lively narrative of family events, and allows a useful chronological framework to be developed, while her frequent reference to friends and associates helps build up a picture of a social circle whose surviving correspondence might also be traced.

Other research subjects currently being pursued include: Rothschild heraldic symbols; the Japanese Gardens at Gunnersbury; Rothschild connections with and views of governments (see the article by Layna Mosley on page 19); Friend Lamb, a Rothschild employee in the 19th century; Thomas

Jeckyll and his work for Cyril Flower; and the art collections of the Austrian Rothschilds.

Conservation

Conservation work on the collections has focused on three areas. The bindings of volumes are on the whole in good structural order but have become somewhat dessicated over the century or more for which most of them have survived. A programme of leather-dressing to replace lost lanolin in the leather has continued throughout the year. This will slow down further deterioration and avoid more drastic intervention.

The transfer to the new Archive of records from the years between 1930 and 1970 is being

preceded by a programme of 'preventative medicine', removing rusting paperclips and Treasury tags and introducing acid-neutral storage wrappers.

Work has also started on the cleaning and reboxing of the collection of more than 700 Autochromes (early colour photographs in the form of glass transparencies) which were deposited in the Archive in 1998 and which reflect the photographic interests of Lionel de Rothschild (1882-1942). The plates feature many portraits of members of the family and family houses and gardens. The conservation programme will return them to a condition in which they can be safely copied for future use.



Evelyn Achille de Rothschild, Lionel's brother, killed in Palestine, 1917



A Japanese garden, probably on the Rothschilds' Gunnersbury estate