

Review of the year's work

Victor Gray, Director of the Rothschild Archive

Acquisitions

Undoubtedly the most significant event for the Archive during the year was the arrival of the surviving papers of the Austrian Rothschild family from Moscow, where they were taken at the end of the War, having been seized by the Nazis in 1938. The story of the return is told more fully later in the Annual Review (see page 24). It marks the end of a concerted campaign to which many branches of the Rothschild family have lent support. The papers have been placed in the Archive in London through the generosity of Mrs Betty Looram, the senior surviving member of the Austrian branch of the Rothschild family, in making them over to the Trust.

A further substantial acquisition of papers relating to the French branch of the Rothschild family has been secured through Baron Eric de Rothschild. While largely of too recent date for immediate opening to research, the collection does contain some important papers concerning the estates and legacies of a number of major figures in the family, not least Baron James, the founder of the French bank, for whom an inventory of Château Lafite, made at the time of his death in 1868, has been preserved, striking in its modesty compared to that made after the death of Baron Alphonse in 1905 with its dazzling array of furniture and art in his Paris houses, at Ferrières and at Lafite. Other papers concern a number of foundations established by members of the family and papers relating to the design and building of the family tomb in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

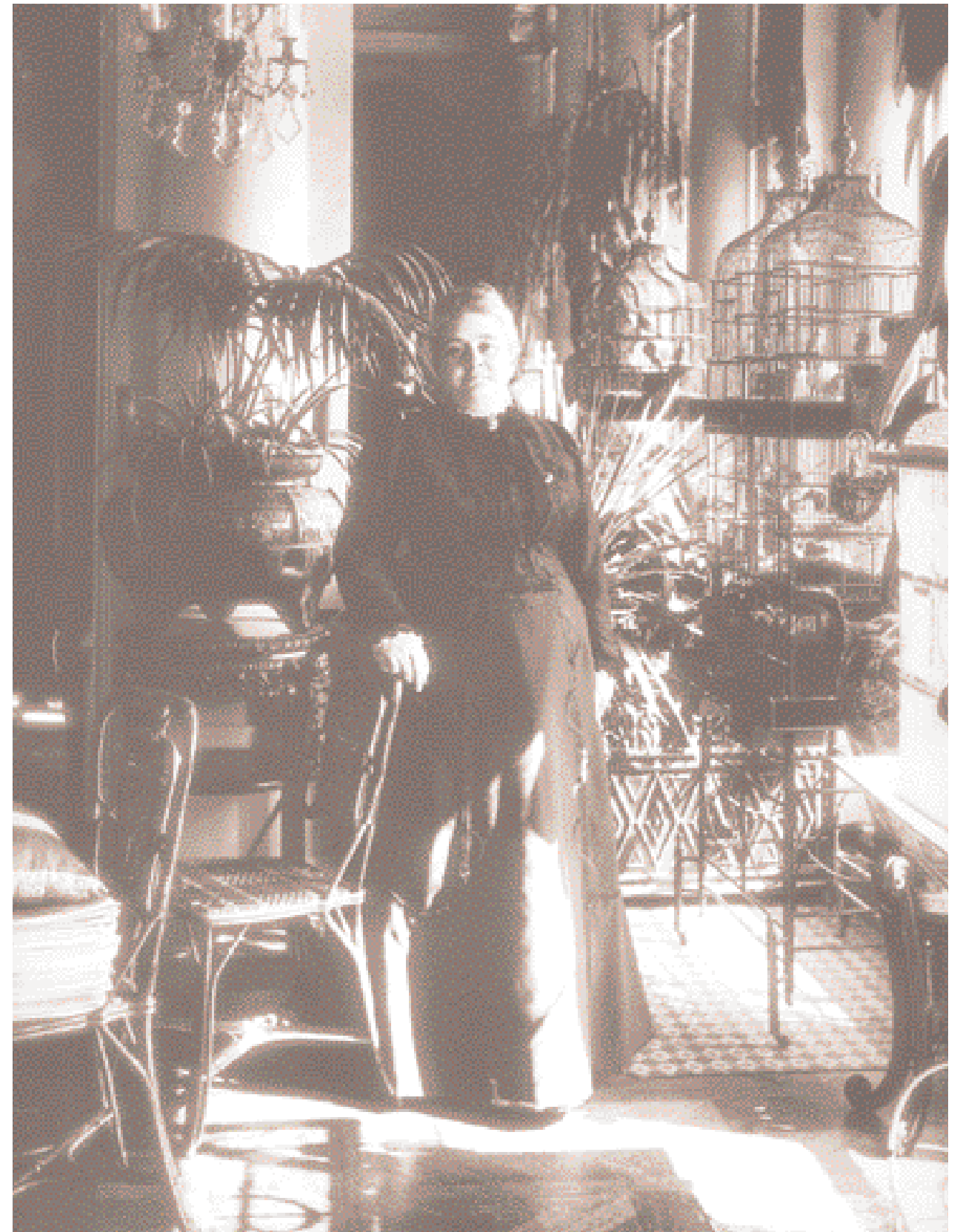
The largest bulk of material received during the year has been made up of files relating to the work of N M Rothschild & Sons during the inter-War and immediate post-War period. This on-going transfer of files will eventually ensure that the account of the bank's activities, so complete for the earlier period, will be brought much closer to the present day. The immediate target is for the period up to 1970. Other acquisitions are listed on page 42 of this Review.

The Library

An important part of the Archive's activity is the development of a research library to support and elucidate the collections of papers. A major target is the acquisition of a comprehensive set of publications written by members of the family. Highlights of acquisitions towards this goal, secured this year, have been the first four volumes of *Novitates Zoologicae*, the zoological journal founded by Walter Rothschild in 1897 and co-edited by him until his death in 1937. Issues of this journal are now considerable rarities. A further, finely illustrated paper by Walter, on the *Genus Casuarius* (the cassowaries), published in 1899, has also been acquired.



'*Casuarius Uniappendiculatus*' from Walter Rothschild's work on the *Genus Casuarius*, 1899



Laura-Thérèse, Baroness James de Rothschild (1847-1931) photographed at the Villa Madrid at Cannes on 30 March 1902 by Charles Vincent, nephew of M André Capron and his wife, Adéla, née Weisweiler, owners of the villa and friends of the Baroness. The photographic plate, The Rothschild Archive's 1000th accession, was presented by the great-nephew of the photographer, M Frédéric Vincent.



One of the archive boxes used by the Russian Central State Archives to store Fonds 637, the Austrian Rothschild papers, now transferred to the Rothschild Archive

In a completely different field, the lavishly produced catalogue of Edouard de Rothschild's collection of the French 16th-century ceramicist Bernard Palissy, published in 1952 with a biography of Palissy by Germaine de Rothschild, Edouard's widow, is a fine addition to the collection.

An early pamphlet *La réponse de Rothschild 1er. Roi des Juifs à Satan, Dernier Roi des Imposteurs*, published in Paris in 1846 is one manifestation of a vituperative pamphlet war waged in the wake of a fatal railway accident in July 1848 on the Chemin de Fer du Nord, James de Rothschild's newly opened railway line.¹ The event provided a focus for anti-semitism in France at the time and the series of pamphlets, now rare, is an interesting record of the arguments advanced at the time both for and against the Rothschilds, Jewry, capitalism and railways.

Conservation

This year has seen the completion of the work of cleaning and conserving the collection of more than 700 photographic plates produced by Lionel de Rothschild using the Autochrome process, which created some of the earliest photographic images in colour. The plates include portraits of members of the family and images of Rothschild houses and gardens, in particular Ascott and Gunnersbury. Now restored to their original condition, the images are available for research and may one day form the focus of an exhibition. The gift by Edmund de Rothschild to the Archive of both the plates and the original cameras by which they were produced is a handsome contribution to the developing body of historical images housed among the collections.²

Research Projects

The essential work of cataloguing the archives to make their content accessible to researchers continues behind the scenes on a day-to-day basis, though this year the arrival of the Moscow papers and other demands have eaten into the time available for this purpose.

Nevertheless, a continuing focus has been the project to list the 3,500 letters written in the year 1848 which survive among the Sundry Private Correspondence Series (XI/109). This particular year had been chosen as a pilot for assessing the value of this huge 'spinal' series, running from 1814-1903 and as yet largely unexplored. 1848 is of interest because of the impact of the 'Year of Revolutions' on the Rothschilds' business activities. How far would these letters tell us more and in what detail?

The letters are written in French, English, German, and Judendeutsch. To date work has been completed on the first two groups and is underway on the Judendeutsch letters. The German material will be tackled later in the year.

Results to date suggest that a great deal of information will emerge on the Rothschilds' reactions as events unfolded and on the detail of how they sought to shore up their operations in Vienna and Frankfurt by injecting support from the other family banks. This was by far the most serious threat to the family's operations since the founding of the five banks and the correspondence in this series will, it seems clear, tell historians a great deal about the scale of the financial turmoil set up in Europe by the events of the year.

A second project now underway is the listing of the letters and reports of August Belmont, the Rothschild agent in New York, during the years of the American Civil

War. Once again, the intention is to assess the level of Rothschild engagement with the events of a period of civil, political and economic turmoil. The project is far from completion and it is not yet clear how far Belmont's accounts of the upsets in the markets and the developing political and military events will add new material to the body of historical knowledge. Certainly, his regular details of gold shipments and of the effects of the War on the trade in cotton and tobacco appear to provide a new and potentially important perspective on events.

Work has continued on the compilation of a bibliography of printed works by members of the family. Baroness Philippine de Rothschild has kindly given access to the collections of publications by Barons Henri and Philippe de Rothschild at Château Mouton in support of this project. It is hoped that work will be completed during 2003 on publications prior to 1900.

The long and complicated programme for the translation into English of the 20,000 letters in Judendeutsch between the Rothschild brothers has reached a first landmark with the completion of the translation for the key period 1814-1818. Work is now progressing on the next period, covering 1826-1831 (letters between the two periods have not, for some reason, survived).

Meanwhile options for publishing the 1814-1818 letters on the Internet are being explored, in order to make this major new source available to historians. The letters cover the period of the Rothschilds' funding campaign for the Allied armies in the Napoleonic Wars and give much new detail on the arrangement of post-War finance for many European governments.

Researchers

During the year, copies of two doctoral theses based extensively on work undertaken in the Archive were donated. Pedro Ortúñez Goicolea's work on the nationalisation of Spanish railways, presented to the University of Valladolid, draws heavily upon the later years of Rothschild railways in Spain, while Felicitas Kunth's University of Vienna thesis on the art collections of the Austrian branch of the Rothschild family is the most detailed study to date of the growth and coverage of those collections.

Current research in the Archive is as wide-reaching as ever in its scope. Among subjects touched upon during the year covered by this Review have been: the calico printing industry, the Channel Tunnel, the Marconi scandal of 1912, the bond market 1895-1906, British holders of cotton bonds issued by the Confederacy during the Civil War, Rothschild interests in Brazil and Russia, Rothschild business agents around the world and the history of the Naples bank of CM von Rothschild e figli. A growing number of research enquiries touch upon the architecture of Rothschild houses and the history of the family's art collections and of individual pieces within them. Biographical research is also common and varies in scale from the search for a specific detail to the full-blown biography. Four such are currently in preparation and will draw, in some cases heavily, upon the Archive's resources.²

Research Links

The building up of contacts with other collections of archives which may illuminate papers in The Rothschild Archive is another part of the work of facilitating and improving research into Rothschild history. This year contacts have been made with



August Belmont, the Rothschilds' agent in the United States

the Director of the Archive of Vítkovice, the Czech iron and steel company in which the Rothschild family had a controlling interest between 1843 and 1939, when it was forcibly transferred to the Nazi industrial conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring. A considerable number of documents survive among this Archive relating to the period of Rothschild involvement and contacts are being developed.

Another major industrial concern, in which the English and French Rothschild banks were heavily involved, were the mercury mines at Almadén in south-west Spain. In 1835, the Rothschilds secured the rights to the working and output of these mines, giving them a virtual worldwide monopoly on this vital component in the refining of gold. They retained an involvement until the mines were nationalised in 1929. Discussions have taken place with the staff of the Archive at Almadén and it is hoped that exchanges of information will broaden into possible microfilm programmes.

A number of Viennese archives have also been either visited or contacted in an attempt to gain a better understanding of what documentation may still survive to increase our understanding of the business and charitable interests of the Austrian family, particularly in the 19th century. Already a series of reports from Lionel de Rothschild to Chancellor Metternich, written as Austrian Consul-General in London and discussing the state of British commerce and industry in 1838, have been secured in microform from the Staatsarchiv in Vienna.

Research support has continued for the proposed exhibition on the Rothschilds as collectors, scheduled to open in the Philadelphia Museum in 2005 and thereafter to travel in Europe. Other items have also been loaned during the year to: the Museum of London for their exhibition on 'Britain and Brazil'; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto for the exhibition 'Gift of the Gods' (on the history of wine); to the Cultura Inglesa in São Paulo, Brazil for an exhibition on 'The British Presence in Brazil'; to the Norwich Castle Museum for an exhibition of the paintings of Frederick Sandys; and to the Yeshiva University Museum in New York for an exhibition on the Jewish painter, Moritz Daniel Oppenheim.

During the year, a proposal has been drawn up within the Archive for a substantial research project to assess and analyse the volume and nature of the Rothschild family's charitable activities throughout Europe. Of the many facets of Rothschild activities this is the area about which least is known and the project would attempt to set this within the context of the Jewish tradition of charitable giving and to use the results as an indicator of the contribution which this tradition has made, both to the Jewish community and to European society at large. At the end of the year under consideration for this Review, attempts were being made to secure funding to allow the project to begin.

The Rothschild Archive's website (www.rothschildarchive.org) is visited by an increasing number of people and a growing number of initial approaches to the staff of the Archive are being received in this way. The website will be further developed in the coming year, with the addition of more research material and facilities for those pursuing studies which may benefit from the Archive's collections.

At the same time, the attempt to attract greater numbers of researchers has led to the production of introductory leaflets in both French and German which have been distributed to a number of relevant sites in Europe.



Rothschild Archive Bursaries

During the year, the Trustees, in recognition of the difficulties sometimes encountered by students in making practical arrangements to visit the Archive to undertake research, initiated the Rothschild Archive Bursaries. These may be awarded to researchers engaged in full-time education and committed to projects which involve substantial use of The Rothschild Archive.

The bursaries, which are limited in number, are not intended to cover the full cost of any period of research in the Archive but are designed to provide practical assistance with travel, accommodation or incidental costs associated with such work. Further details can be obtained from the Director.

The Vítkovice Ironworks (formerly Witkowitz), a lithograph by Ernst Knippel, c. 1850

NOTES

1. The pamphlet war is described in N. Ferguson: *The World's Banker*, (London, 1998), 455-457
2. Stanley Weintraub on Lionel and Charlotte de Rothschild, George Ireland on the sons of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, Laura Schor on Betty de Rothschild and Kenneth Rose on Victor, 3rd Lord Rothschild