

Review of the Year's Work

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The earliest known use by the Rothschild family of its newly granted coat of arms, on a book binding of 1824 (see p8)



The Rothschild Research Forum

The launch of the new Rothschild Research Forum in May has provided an on-line library of information, sources, texts and news for anyone engaged in detailed research into aspects of the history of the Rothschild family or one of the many subjects with which their lives intersect. The Forum was described in some detail in the last edition of the *Review* and it would be superfluous to repeat that description. What is clear, however, after a year of operation, is that the Forum has already fulfilled two of the expectations which surrounded its launch.

First, it has provided a focal point for a range of researchers, scattered across the globe (from Canada to Australia, Denmark to Israel) and diverse in their interests (from early photography to international debt, from cultural geographies to the race for mineral resources). To date there are well over two hundred of them and the Forum provides them with the opportunity to keep pace with what is going on in related fields, to explore interactions and to access a volume of original material never before made available outside the Archive.

Secondly, it has changed the whole focus of the work of the Archive, shifting the primary question from “How do we help a hypothetical researcher in the future?” to “What can we put out there now, via the Web, for the constituency of interest which we know exists and which has a certain set of interests and approaches?”

Throughout the year, new material has been regularly added to the resources of the site; there are now over 700 pages of content. A major addition over the coming months will be translations, in English and German, together with images, of some 2,000 letters written in Jüddeutsch and exchanged among the five Rothschild brothers in the crucial years of their ascent to international status as bankers. This is the first fruit of a project which has now been some twenty years in the making and for the launch of which technical preparations have been underway for many months.

Rothschild and philanthropy

The beginning of 2004 saw the start of a substantial research project, the first major externally funded academic research to be commissioned by the Archive. Generous funding from the Hanadiv Charitable Foundation has made possible this exploratory study of the role of philanthropy and charitable activity, particularly among the Jewish community in Europe. By focusing on the activities of the Rothschild family, the study will offer a comparative perspective across the European countries in which they lived and operated and across an extensive time-span. The project, led by Dr Klaus Weber and spread across three years, will break new ground in its exploration of a range of themes, including the role and practice of charity amid evolving systems of state welfare and differences between Jewish and broader practice and experience. The project, which is being jointly run by the Archive and the Parkes Centre for the Study of Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton, is being steered by an Academic Advisory Group comprising Prof. David Cesarani of the University of Southampton, Dr Peter Mandler of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, Dr Rainer Liedtke of the University of Giessen and, from the Archive, Melanie Aspey and myself.

Partnerships in research

The model of partnership with institutions sharing similar interests and goals to those of the Archive, exemplified in the relationship with the Parkes Centre, is one which the Archive is keenly pursuing as part of its developing role as an *animateur* and facilitator of studies touching upon Rothschild themes. The strong links developed with Waddesdon Manor, in itself a centre for research into art historical themes based around Ferdinand de Rothschild’s magnificent collections, have extended still further this year. A working seminar was held in the Archive in which staff of the two institutions exchanged notes and facts on images of the Rothschild family with a view to identifying hitherto unidentified photographs. This seminar may, in itself, lead on to a gallery of images to be published on the Forum.

There has also been increasing dialogue with the Natural History Museum in London and its Walter Rothschild Museum at Tring in Hertfordshire. The first outputs of this are now present on the Forum and there is a growing expectation of more co-operation, focused upon the zoological work of Walter Rothschild as reflected in archives, publications and specimens among the Museum’s collections. Other institutions with which contacts and/or projects have been pursued during the year include Halton House, once the property of Alfred de Rothschild and now owned and used by the Royal Air Force, Gunnersbury Park Museum, the former home of Baron Lionel de

Rothschild in west London now administered by the London Boroughs of Hounslow and Ealing, the Château de Pregny in Switzerland, built by Baron Adolphe de Rothschild and still in family ownership, and the Centre des Archives du Monde du Travail at Roubaix, outside Lille, which houses the records of the French bank of de Rothschild Frères.

This last link seems set to become even closer during the year 2004/5 as negotiations towards the successful transfer to the Rothschild Archive Trust of the ownership of these archives, which remain the property of the family in France, move towards a conclusion. The hope and expectation is that the Centre, which is part of the Archives Nationales de France, will wish to continue to house, administer and make the papers accessible to researchers, while the Trust, as owners, will seek to strengthen joint working and evolve, in discussion with the administration of the Centre, new ways of exploring and developing the use of the French archives.

Acquisitions

The major collection of new papers this year has been generously placed in the Archive by Sir Evelyn de Rothschild. The papers centre mainly on the lives of Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1947) and his wife Marie (née Perugia) and contain a great deal of correspondence, both between members of the family and from friends and associates, throwing much light on matters social and political. One particular emphasis is on Leopold's lifelong involvement in the world of horse-racing, culminating in the 1904 Derby win by his horse *St. Amant*.

The death in 2003 of Jeanne, widow of Baron Eugène de Rothschild (1884-1976) severs one of the few remaining links to the last generation of banking Rothschilds in Austria. Though the former screen-actress Jeanne Stuart only married the Baron in 1952, when he had moved to the USA, the papers and mementoes which have now come to the Archive through the generosity of her executors, include many items – in particular photographs – from the family's estate at Enzesfeld in the 1930s where, famously, the Duke of Windsor found his first retreat following his abdication in 1936.

A fascinating memento, from the estate of the late Liliane de Rothschild (1916-2003), is a printed poem on the occasion of the marriage of James and Betty de Rothschild in Frankfurt in 1824, printed on silk and bound in red velvet bearing the arms of the family embroidered in silver thread (000/1322). Apart from its intrinsic beauty and the fact that it marks the beginning of one of the most successful and celebrated Rothschild marriages of the period, this is to date the earliest surviving family use of the coat of arms in the form awarded in 1822.

By chance, two rare items of printed propaganda from the Year of Revolutions, 1848, have come to the Archive during the year. The first, *Ein offener Brief an Rothschild*, is a conventional piece of anti-Rothschild propaganda from Vienna, rejoicing in the losses suffered by Salomon von Rothschild, head of the Viennese bank and accusing him of indifference to the plight of the poor of the city. The second takes the form of an open letter to James de Rothschild published in the *Tocsin des Travailleurs* and written in August by Emile Barrault, the Professor of Literature who became the mouthpiece of the Saint-Simonians, a quasi-mystical, socialist-orientated movement. The lengthy letter, which opens 'Vous êtes un miracle, Monsieur', attempts, on the surface, to persuade Rothschild to support the cause of the 'ultra-démocrates' as opposed to the 'ultra-bourgeoisie' whose time is done, in particular by giving his weight to the establishment of a more open banking system in the interests of the people at large. Overall, it is an eloquent and elaborate statement of the aspirations of the radicals at the time between the brutal repression of revolt in June and the election of Louis-Napoleon in September. It also clearly indicates the centrality of James's position as the personification of all that was deemed good and bad in the French financial system.¹

St Amant being
toasted on his
Derby win, 1904

Library

The task of building and sustaining a library of works on and by the Rothschild family and its interests has developed renewed vigour with the compilation of the *Bibliography* of family writings (see the article by Caroline Shaw, p.18).

A volume of twelve songs by Hannah Mathilde von Rothschild of Frankfurt (1832-1924), *Zwölf Lieder für Singstimme mit Pianofortebegleitung*, published in the late 1880s, sets to music the work of a number of poets, mostly German (including the epic poet Wilhelm von Bodenstedt, the poet and dramatist Franz von Dingelstedt and the Frankfurt writer Wilhelm Jordan), but also Russian (Alexey Tolstoy) and French (Paul Collin). Many of her chosen poets had also had works set to music by major composers of the day: Liszt, for example, in the case of Tolstoy, Collin by Tchaikovsky, Bodenstedt by Brahms. The range of these songs gives a clear indication of the breadth of Hannah Mathilde's interests in contemporary European poetry and music.

Two facets of the multi-talented Henri de Rothschild (1872-1947) are reflected in two rare pamphlets acquired during the course of the year. The first is the text of his play *Le grand patron*, performed at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées in 1931 and published in the review *La Petite Illustration* that year. The second is the text of a paper delivered by Henri two years later to an audience at the Bibliothèque Nationale and privately printed as *Comment j'ai réuni ma collection d'autographes*. (A fuller listing of new acquisitions appears on p59).

Early photography

The Rothschild family's connection with the early years of photography has been explored in earlier editions of the *Review* and reappears in Anthony Hamber's article in this edition (p.44). It is a developing field of interest and led to a lecture this year by Melanie Aspey to the Historical Group of the Royal Photographic Society.

Jeanne Stuart, later
Baroness Eugène
de Rothschild,
photographed by
Dorothy Wilding
in the 1930s (see p8)





One of the visual gems in the Archive is the collection of over 700 Autochrome photographs taken by Lionel de Rothschild (1882-1942) in the years before the First World War. This early colour process, devised by the Lumière brothers, produces results of a stunning delicacy which is particularly difficult to reproduce using modern printing techniques. During the year, experiments were undertaken in collaboration with the Hurtwood Press, printers of fine-art catalogues and books, to try to emulate the quality of the originals. If satisfactory results can be produced, planning will begin for a touring exhibition (and possible publication) of the best of this collection.

During the year, lectures were given by staff of the Archive to the Historical Group of the Royal Historical Society on early photography in the Archive's collections; to a seminar group of the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at King's College London on N M Rothschild & Sons and Brazil; to a lunchtime audience at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, on Walter Rothschild; to a Mellon Foundation Study Day at Waddesdon Manor, on sources for Rothschild garden history; and to the Acton Local History Society, on the Rothschilds at Gunnersbury.

Articles on the Archive appeared in *History Today* and, in France, in *Entreprises et Histoire*, the latter kindly contributed by Professor François Crouzet.

Researchers

The number of people approaching the Archive for information has been substantially increased by the development of the Research Forum. Often these initial approaches result in eventual research visits to the Reading Room and the range of subjects tackled this year remains gratifyingly wide.

Among those working on financial, banking and economic history, topics have included the 1837 New York banking crisis, the Barings crisis of 1890 and the Creditanstalt crash in Vienna in 1931. Rothschilds' leading place in the sovereign loans market has brought researchers into the development of bondholder organisations and the history of the *pari passu* clause in the international bond market, as well as more specific research into the 1881 loan to the Hungarian Government and loans to Brazil and Buenos Aires. The rich correspondence of Rothschild agents around the world continues to attract historians; this year, Samuel Phillips, the agent in Brazil, August Belmont in New York and Benjamin Davidson in California have all been the subject of detailed work.

Biographical studies have included the sons of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, Charles Rothschild (1877-1923), Betty de Rothschild (Baroness James, 1805-1886), Ferdinand de Rothschild, builder of Waddesdon Manor (1839-1898), Hélène van Zuylén de Nyevelt (née de Rothschild, 1863-1947), as well as William Smith, the abolitionist, the Empress Eugénie, Trinidad Huerta, the Spanish guitarist, Michael Balfe, Victorian opera singer, the Pereire brothers and Benjamin Disraeli.

Questions on the Rothschild art collections abound but this year detailed research has focused on Alfred de Rothschild's collections of paintings and furniture and Adolphe de Rothschild's crystal, while the family collections have been used to study the cultural geography of collecting, the collecting of French decorative arts in 19th-century Britain and the history of Fabergé.

NOTES

1. Extracts from the letter appear in Corti: *The reign of the House of Rothschild*, 1928, p. 270 and in Ferguson: *The World's Banker*, 1998, p.495.