

# Enduring ephemera

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Barbra Ruperto explores an aspect of the Archive's collections which delights the eye and offers rich rewards for many researchers

Wherever we go and whatever we do we leave a paper trail behind us, and in no part of our lives is this more true than when we shop. The Rothschilds are no exception. In a letter home to his wife from Paris in 1869 Lionel de Rothschild writes that his children 'Lally [Leonora] and Leo have been out shopping all the morning and are trying to find something fresh and new... Write if you want us to bring back anything, we shall order the chocolate and Leo is going to buy 2 or 3 silk dresses which you may give to some of your good natured friends'.<sup>1</sup> For each of their transactions invoices, receipts and account book entries would have been created.

Not designed to last, today's till receipts are certainly not beautiful to look at and quickly fade to nothing, throw away items of a modern consumer society, but before the advent of electronically produced till receipts, handwritten shop and tradesmen's bills, often beautifully designed, were much more enduring.

Trade ephemera including receipts, known as bill headings, have attracted collectors for the beauty of their design and the valuable detail they provide for the study of many aspects of history, including trade history, social history, the history of consumption, design and printing as well as local and family history. A collection of eighteenth-century trade ephemera bought by Ferdinand de Rothschild in 1891 from the sale of collections of Hippolyte Destailleur (1822–1893), the architect of Waddesdon Manor, is being used as the basis for a project studying the role of advertising in the creation of consumer culture in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

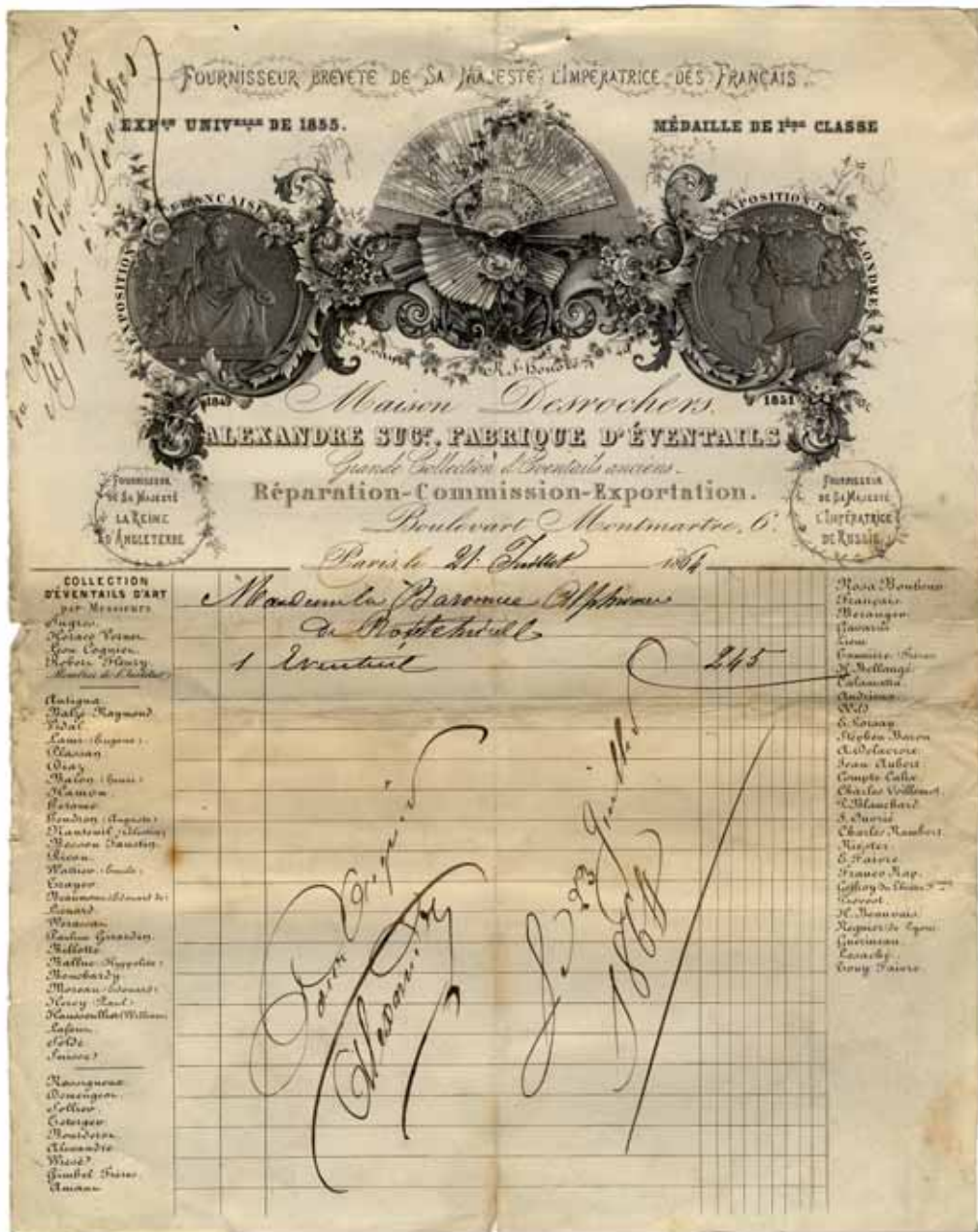
Important collections created by ephemera specialists are now preserved in major institutions, including the John Johnson collection at the Bodleian Library and Sir Ambrose Heal's collection now housed in the Print Room at the British Museum. Heal's collection provided the source of information from which he created his catalogue of furniture makers of London.<sup>3</sup> He lamented the poor survival rate of bill headings compared to other forms of ephemera and it is true that many archives do not keep this 'low level' material.

The vast amount of trade ephemera that survives in The Rothschild Archive has accumulated naturally, rather than being artificially assembled and the collections in which they survive reflect the relationship of members of the family with their business and the structure of that business in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Individual receipts were sent to the bank for payment, or found their way to solicitors for calculating estate duty. Thousands of receipts, particularly dating from the mid nineteenth century onwards, are preserved in the Archive as a record of the extraordinary spending power of many individual members of the Rothschild family, providing a glimpse into their lifestyles, relationships and interests.

For the wealthiest in London society the West End had come to replace Fleet Street, The Strand and Cheapside as the fashionable shopping district. Thomas Nash's Regent Street, built between 1818–1820, with its elegant colonnades covering shoppers from the rain, changed the face of the West End. Soon Piccadilly, Oxford Street, and Bond Street were the most fashionable shopping districts. West End shops are well represented amongst the receipts preserved in the Archive and provided everything that the well-heeled gentleman might require for himself and his family. In Bond Street there were Stulz, Wain, Karop & Day, tailors, the gun manufacturer Charles William Lancaster, and Cooper & Peppin, umbrella and parasol manufactures from whom Sir Anthony de Rothschild purchased a fan on ivory stocks in 1856.<sup>4</sup> In Oxford Street there were the jewellers C. & C. Williams & Hill & Co., of whom Mayer Amschel de

Rothschild was a customer and W. Benson, cigar importer. On Piccadilly there was Scott's, hatters by Royal appointment, who supplied Leopold de Rothschild with silk hats in 1916 and whose bill heading depicts their premises with smartly attired gentlemen strolling about outside but which also carries the warning that overdue accounts were charged at five per cent interest. From the receipts one can see that the vast majority of traders and shopkeepers operated an account system allowing settlement at a later date, sometimes years after the original purchases were made. This system did not always seem to suit the shopkeepers and traders as numerous letters exist amongst the receipts requesting early payment to help alleviate cash flow problems.

Paris, another of the great shopping capitals of Europe, also underwent significant changes during the nineteenth century as the department store became a shopping Mecca. The spectacular rise of the Bon Marché, founded in 1852, led the way. Rebuilt during the 1860s to a design of iron and glass by the groundbreaking architects Eiffel and Boileau, it became the first purpose built department store in the world. With the air of an exhibition, new and sumptuous dis-



An ornately designed receipt for Maison Desrochers, fan sellers, Paris, where Leonora, Baroness Alphonse de Rothschild purchased a fan in 1864.

One of several receipts from 1917 for luxury foods ordered by Leopold de Rothschild at Fortnum & Mason to be sent to his sons Evelyn and Anthony, both fighting in World War I. Fortnum & Mason had built up a tradition of supplying parcels to soldiers and naval officers who could afford to supplement their basic rations.



plays and the ability to browse, its grand style reflected the newly rebuilt city. Other department stores soon followed, such as the Grand Magasins du Louvre and the Grand Magasins aux Galeries Lafayette, both of which appear numerous times in Rothschild receipt collections, and not just those of the French Rothschilds. Their grand style is reflected in the grand designs of their bill headings depicting their premises, views over Paris and streets with shoppers and horse-drawn trams.

At the most exclusive end of the market in London Fabergé opened its only branch outside Russia in 1903 and as Kieran McCarthy has examined in his article 'Fabergé and the Rothschilds'<sup>5</sup> the Rothschilds were second only to the royal family as Fabergé's most important customers. Only a couple of receipts survive to record purchases from Fabergé, one addressed to Mrs Leopold de Rothschild in 1914 for a bell push and pencil and showing again that the Rothschilds received a discount on their purchases at the shop in recognition of their status as important customers, and the other for three Orenburg shawls, another Russian export. The shawls were probably bought as presents, as McCarthy found that most Rothschild purchases from Fabergé were given to reinforce familial and social ties.



Fabulous Fabergé items were not the only things given as presents; wines, bonbons and chocolates, which until the end of the nineteenth century had to be hand made and were not widely available, feature in the accounts. Lionel sent his Frankfurt cousin, Mayer Carl, three dozen[sic] finest wines from Gorman & Co, Mark Lane in 1858 and in the same year Baron James brought over five kilos of chocolate and bonbons from F. Marquis, Paris, to be given as presents.

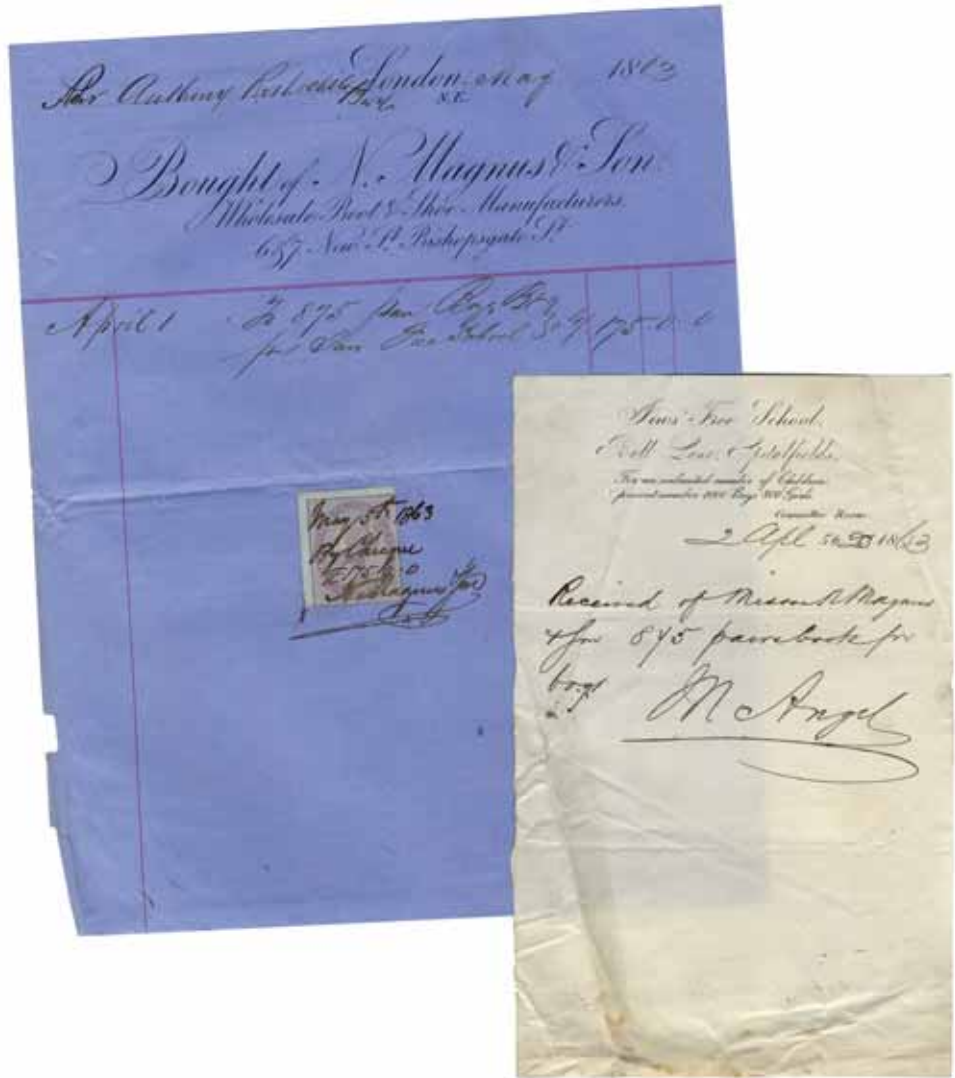
Bill headings for the Grand Magasins du Louvre and the Grand Magasins aux Galeries Lafayette, 1901, reflecting the grandeur of shopping in a Parisian department store.

The need to maintain appearances is neatly reflected in Alfred de Rothschild's receipt collection which contains numerous receipts from his hairdresser, Penhaligon's of St James's Street who attended him both at his London and Buckinghamshire houses. Even in the month before he died he was attended twenty eight times by his hairdresser.

Receipts from concert agents also show his love of the theatre; one from 1917 lists boxes at several theatres, including Daly's, just off Leicester Square, where the popular light opera *Maid of the Mountains* was running and at The Adelphi where another successful musical *The Boy* had opened just a few days before. Alfred also regularly hired Karl Hubert's Viennese Orchestra, perhaps to play at his own dinners and receptions.

Guests invited to Rothschild houses naturally expected, and found, the finest wines served at the table and receipts for wines and spirit are amongst the most common in the collection. In London in the 1850s the national taste was for port, Madeira and sweet sherry, but at the best tables champagne, burgundy and claret were also served. By the 1890s it had become common to drink champagne throughout meals and over nine million bottles were sold in Britain each year. Both London importers such as John Day, Son & Watson of Water Lane and French wine merchants helped to keep Rothschild cellars stocked. In 1862 Mayer Amschel bought 100 bottles of Château Lafite from Keyl & Cie, Bordeaux. Another French wine merchant who supplied several members of the Rothschild family, M Saint-Amant, later gave his name to Leopold de Rothschild's 1905 Derby-winning horse.

Sir Anthony de Rothschild maintained the family's support for the Jews Free School of which he became President in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1863 he supplied 875 pairs of boots for the boys as shown in these two receipts from the manufacturer N. Magnus & Son and the Jews Free School signed by the headmaster Moses Angel.



Receipt for curtains bought by Sir Anthony de Rothschild for the Ark of the Central Synagogue in Portland Street, where he was a warden. The curtains were bought shortly after the consecration of the synagogue in April 1870.



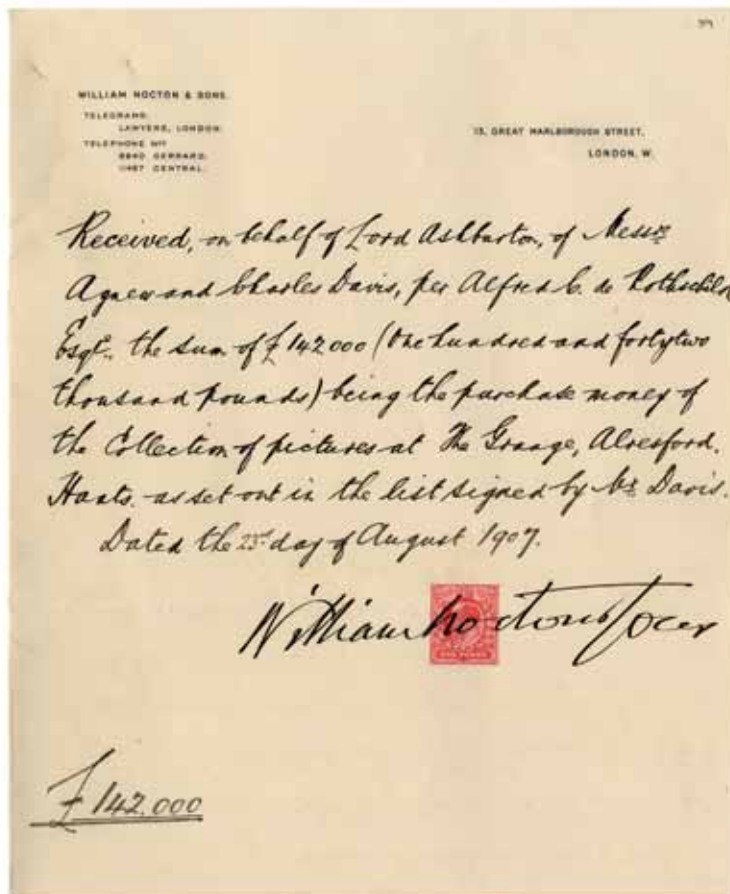
The history of Rothschild houses, art and furniture collections has been an area of great interest to researchers, one in which receipts have proved hugely valuable, not only for establishing provenance for individual pieces, but also in providing information on dealers and craftsmen as well as collecting tastes.

Receipts have helped piece together a picture of the activities of Alfred Beurdeley et Fils, the Parisian cabinet maker for whose business, which existed from 1818 to 1895, there are no surviving records. The Rothschilds, particularly Ferdinand, were known to have been clients but less is known about the other members of the family buying these works. Receipts show that Lionel spent Fr.71,250 on a number of items including, in 1863, a Louis XV style suite of salon furniture and a marble table for his new home at 148 Piccadilly.

Lionel's advisor on interior decoration, M Joyeau, visited Beurdeley on several occasions, once in the company of Lionel's wife Charlotte, who wrote to her husband, 'The crystal chandelier is ugly – but the crystals are white and clear and fine. Joyeau advises you to buy them, as he says you have not enough ornaments or rough crystal for even one chandelier, much less for two'.<sup>6</sup> Other receipts show that Joyeau also advised Anthony de Rothschild, who was known in the family for his good taste, on the interiors of Aston Clinton House in 1857–1858.

Salomon James de Rothschild, in the first year of his short marriage before his early death in 1864, made numerous purchases from Beurdeley which perhaps furnished the home at rue Berryer in Paris that he shared with his wife Adèle. Between February 1862 and July 1863, 32 separate visits are recorded to the cabinet maker and curiosity dealer where furniture and sculpture were bought. The purchases are documented on several receipts preserved amongst the documents gathered in the estate papers of Adèle on her death in 1922, along with other purchases from curiosity dealers, fan makers and jewellers both in London and Paris.

Illustrations on the reverse of a Dupont receipt of 1899 are both advertisement and catalogue for the range of products available.



This 1907 receipt confirms the purchase of a collection of pictures from Alexander Baring, 1st Lord Ashburton at Northington Grange, Hampshire by Alfred de Rothschild. The art dealer Charles Davis who negotiated this purchase, which included Holbeins and Rembrandts, became a good friend of Alfred's. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported in 1914 that Alfred visited Davis every day during his final illness.

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*En montant*



*En descendant*

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Fauteuil à 2 manivelles, articulé.



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Fauteuil à 2 manivelles, mi-ouvert.



**Voltaire articulé,**  
à 2 manivelles, mi-ouvert.



**N° 1. FAUTEUIL canot,**  
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**N° 2. FAUTEUIL aux grandes**  
roues caoutchoucées et par 2 manivelles.



**FAUTEUIL aux grandes**  
roues caoutchoucées et par 2 manivelles.



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**VOITURE DE PROMENADE**  
roues caoutchouées



**VOITURE DE PROMENADE**  
en tous genres, Parasol articulé



**VOITURE**  
sans au moyen de 1 ou 2 leviers.



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panonceau à charnières, vase à bec.



**Pannoneau à charnières,**  
vase à bec.



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POUR  
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INGÉNIEURS-CONSTRUCTEURS  
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MEMBRES DU JURY. HORS CONCOURS 1889-1900. LIÈGE 1905

67, Boulevard de Charonne, PARIS (XI<sup>e</sup>)

Acétylène DISSOUS  
SOUDURE AUTOGÈNE  
PROJECTIONS OXYGÈNE

VOIT "L'OBSTACLE"

TÉLÉPHONE 905.25  
905.57  
SOUDURE AUTOGÈNE 994.93

Paris, le 2/11 1905  
*M. Aubry, Pascal*

200 M

**SCHWARZWALD HOTEL**

HOTEL DE LA FORÊT NOIRE

BLACK FOREST - HOTEL

EIGENTHÜMER **TRIBERG** L. BIERINGER

H. M. POPPER & SOHN, FREIBURG I. B.

Zimmer N<sup>o</sup> 15. 16. 17. 22. 23. 54. 55. 61. 62

Fol. \_\_\_\_\_

Illustration advertising car headlamps to help the driver 'see the obstacle', from an extensive collection of motoring receipts of Baron Henri de Rothschild, 1905.

Bill heading from a receipt for Arthur de Rothschild's visit to the Black Forest Hotel in Triberg in 1900 showing the hotel's beautiful setting.

Other passions of the Rothschild family are reflected in several series of receipted accounts. During its early years motoring was limited to a small minority of those who could afford what was a rather expensive hobby. Both English and French Rothschilds were quick to take to the roads and Henri de Rothschild even financed the makers of Unic cars, Georges Richard & Cie, founded in 1904. Receipts testify not only to Rothschild car ownership – which in France stretched to a fleet of Rolls Royces, Mercedes, Panhard-Levassers, Delaunays and Kellners – but also to the nature of the early car industry. A 1901 bill heading from Garage Saunier,





Engraving of the Market House, Aylesbury, demolished in 1866, from a receipt of E. Margesson, tobacconist trading in Aylesbury Market Place, 1860. Receipts can provide a useful source of topographical information.

Alençon advertised their services as the sale and repair of automobiles, bicycles and sewing machines, a seemingly odd combination but showing how closely connected these new mechanical technologies were. Further receipts illustrate the clothing required for a well-dressed chauffeur in 1902 and other expenses incurred by the hobby.<sup>7</sup> A review of Henri de Rothschild's accounts shows that he spent around 10,000 francs a month on motoring at the turn of the century.<sup>8</sup>

Travel, be it for leisure or to help maintain a healthy constitution, was another pursuit that the Rothschilds could indulge in and receipts from fashionable European spa towns and retreats underline this privilege. The Ritter's Park Hotel in Bad Homburg, Germany was amongst the grandest hotels patronised, according to the bill heading, by the Prince of Wales, Russian and German Grand Dukes and Princes. Other bill headings advertise their grand premises and wonderful settings: the Black Forest Hotel in Triberg is shown against the backdrop of mountains and alongside pictures of the waterfall for which the town is famous; the bill heading for the Baur au Lac hotel, Zürich has vignettes of the views over the lake from the hotel; and the Hotel Stephanie in Baden-Baden, named after Napoleon's adopted daughter and host to guests such as Otto von Bismarck, Henry Ford and the King of Siam, also boasts its grand position, with illustrations of people promenading along the banks of the river in front of the hotel.

Fresh air could be found in the private gardens which became a passion for many Rothschilds and rightly continue to attract attention from researchers. Gunnersbury Park, the first country home of the English Rothschilds bought in 1835, came with ornamental pleasure grounds, luxuriant plantations and walks of great variety contained within the 75 acres of gardens, park and farmland which formed the estate and which were shaped by successive generations. Recent research interest in Gunnersbury has drawn on the extensive collection of estate receipts and through which it is possible to see just how much expenditure went into maintaining the parks and gardens. Purchases of plants, seeds and manure are amongst the most commonly documented. Both local businesses as well as those further afield were used: W. Fromow & Sons of Chiswick supplied clematis and hypericum; the familiar Sutton's Seeds of Reading supplied a huge variety of fruit and vegetables for the kitchen garden and hothouses, from potatoes to melons; but specialist vine fertilizer and ant destroyer was ordered from Alexander

Cross & Sons in Glasgow. Among less common purchases were exotic birds imported and sold by Louis Fraser, Zoological Agent of Knightsbridge, who supplied pope cardinals, red-necked weaver birds, Virginian nightingales, and a blue creeper for the aviaries built by William Wilmer Pocock.

The bill headings are a rich source of information for local historians. As with Gunnersbury where businesses in Acton and the surrounding areas are well represented in the estate receipts,<sup>9</sup> similarly a picture of the businesses in other towns and villages where the Rothschilds had houses can be pieced together. For Tring, Halton and Aston Clinton receipts of many local businesses survive, from plumbers, glaziers and carters to high street shops. The receipts reveal the existence of two ironmongers in Tring in the 1850s: one, unusually run by a woman, Mary Tompkins, and another, Charles Grace, whose shop on Tring High Street is still run by his descendants.<sup>10</sup>

Offering a window onto past lives of shopkeepers and traders and a glimpse of the character of the places where they ran their businesses the thousands of receipts preserved in the Archive are also a testament to the extraordinary lives of the Rothschilds. As sources of information receipts can offer a surprising amount to the researcher as well as being documents of sometimes unexpected beauty.

*Barbra Ruperto joined the staff of The Rothschild Archive in 2006. She was previously the archivist of the London bank C. Hoare & Co.*

A newly completed and substantial index to one of the many receipt collections at The Rothschild Archive is now available to members of The Rothschild Research Forum via the Archive's website at [www.rothschildarchive.org](http://www.rothschildarchive.org). The index lists the private receipts of three brothers – Sir Anthony de Rothschild, Mayer Amschel de Rothschild and Lionel de Rothschild – covering the period 1852–1879. For further information please contact The Rothschild Archive.

## NOTES

- 1 RAL 000/13 Lionel de Rothschild to his wife, Charlotte and son, Natty, Paris, 2 September, 1869.
- 2 'Selling Consumption' is a project run in partnership between Waddesdon Manor and Warwick Eighteenth Century Centre at the University of Warwick.
- 3 Sir Ambrose Heal, *The London Furniture Makers from the Restoration to the Victorian Era, 1660–1840* (London: Batsford, 1953).
- 4 RAL XII/41/1/331.
- 5 The Rothschild Archive *Review of the Year* (2004–2005), pp.34–41.
- 6 RAL 000/84 Charlotte de Rothschild to her husband and sons, Paris, 20 September 1864.
- 7 RAL 58-1-177 and RAL 58-1-1237.
- 8 Accounts of de Rothschild frères RAL OB 52, 2eme semestre, 1903.
- 9 Gunnersbury Estate Receipts, 1905–1918 RAL XII/17/0-13 and also in Private Receipts of Lionel de Rothschild, 1852–1879 RAL XII/41/7-8.
- 10 Private receipt of Sir Anthony de Rothschild, RAL XII/41/1-4.