

THE ROTHSCHILD ARCHIVE

REVIEW OF THE YEAR APRIL 2008 TO MARCH 2009

The Rothschild Archive Trust

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Front cover

Photograph from a publicity brochure for the Royal Mint Refinery, showing plated metal wires used in contemporary electrical appliances and for decorative purposes, c.1948 [RAL 000/1989, presented to The Rothschild Archive as a gift by Gilbert Esposito from the collection of Patricia Sommers.]

A Royal Commission of 1848 recommended that the business of treating unrefined gold should be put out to tender. N M Rothschild & Sons were the successful bidders, operating the Royal Mint Refinery from 1852. Some 10.4 million ounces of gold were refined in 1919, although the Refinery's fortunes were to be mixed over the following decades. By the end of the Second World War, new business opportunities were being explored, and the main area of growth in the operation of the refinery focused upon the manufacture and production of non-ferrous metals in cast and strip form, including copper foil and plated wires. A rolling mill and annealing plant had been added in 1943 to cater for Government orders, and in peacetime these were set to work producing a wide variety of products that met the needs of industry. Promotional brochures produced for the firm's stand at the British Industries Fair held each year at Castle Bromwich provide an insight into the full range of activities of the Royal Mint Refinery. In the 1960s, reviews into the activities of the Royal Mint Refinery led to specific areas of the business being sold off to more specialised firms, and by 1968, the Refinery at 19 Royal Mint Street was closed.

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Introduction

Eric de Rothschild, Chairman of The Rothschild Archive Trust

This issue of the *Review*, the tenth, marks the end of the Trust's first decade.

Over the last ten years the staff of the Archive have welcomed to the London reading room hundreds of visitors from many countries: historians of finance, business and politics, art historians, biographers, family and local historians, historians of philanthropy and social engagement. The articles contained in this *Review* demonstrate vividly the richness of the collections in The Rothschild Archive and the wide range of research interests that they can support. I wish to thank all the contributors to this and previous issues of the *Review* for sharing the results of their research and promoting the collections in a lively and engaging way.

Members of the staff made frequent visits during the year to the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail at Roubaix in order to work on the uncatalogued records of de Rothschild Frères and help prepare them for wider use by researchers. In London the archivists continue to develop finding aids to the collections to make them more readily available for consultation in the reading room or via the Archive's website, www.rothschildarchive.org

The project hosted by the Archive, Jewish Philanthropy and Social Development in Europe 1800–1940, has demonstrated the value of partnerships in achieving shared research goals. In July 2008 Dr Peter Mandler, a member of the Academic Advisory Committee, hosted a final project workshop at Cambridge University's Stephen Hawking Centre which included contributions from members of the project's research team as well as papers from a wider group of academics working in similar fields. The Trustees are grateful to Dr Mandler and his fellow committee members, Professor David Cesarani and Dr Rainer Liedtke, for their outstanding commitment to the project which has done much to raise the profile of the Archive in academic circles.

Following on from this successful and rewarding partnership, the Archive has joined forces with an academic partner, the Centre for Contemporary British History, to manage a series of three Collaborative Doctoral Awards placements, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The first award was made to Michele Blagg for her proposal to work on a history of the Royal Mint Refinery, early results of which can be seen in this *Review*.

None of the activities that the Trust undertakes would be possible without the generous support of N M Rothschild & Sons Limited, Rothschild & Cie Banque, Les Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite), La Fondation Maurice et Noémie de Rothschild and GFA (Château Mouton), and I thank these institutions most warmly on behalf of all the Trustees.

Neither would these have been possible without the dedicated and highly professional staff we have in the Archive, led by Melanie Aspey. I wish to thank them for their invaluable contribution to the success of the Trust.