


The gift to Nathan Rothschild of this portrait of President Andrew Jackson, by R B W Earl, arrived eight days before he died.

Opposite A Robert Thompson mouse in the Reading Room door.

The Bequest of Ralph Holy to the Archive:

The Rothschild Archive Reading Room was sourced from the oaks used in The Rothschild Archive Reading Room were sourced from the Estate in Berwickshire; the historic seat of the Earls of Home and residence of former British Prime Minister and Prime Minister and Privy Council of the United Kingdom, Sir John West. The oak tree is carefully selected before purchase to guarantee the best quality. The oak comes from managed estates that are certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council, an international organisation created in 1992 which strives to ensure long-term timber supplies as well as protecting the environment. The provenance and heritage of each Thompson piece is traceable. The oaks used in The Rothschild Archive Reading Room were sourced from the 3500 acre Hirsle Estate in Berwickshire; the historic seat of the Earls of Home and residence of former British Prime Minister and 14th Earl of Home, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. The trees were dated to be around 200 years old, which means they were likely to have been planted in 1813, three years after Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1866) had established himself at New Court. 1813 was an eventful year for Nathan. It saw the birth of his third son, Nathanial Mayer Rothschild (1812–1870), at New Court on 2 July, and the death of his father, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, the founder of the Rothschild banking dynasty, in Frankfurt on 15 September. Being able to make such historic connections adds to the character of the Reading Room. The use of traditional values and techniques made Thompson’s an ideal partner in the creation of The Rothschild

Mice in the Reading Room: a new home for the Archive.

Natalie Broad describes the development of the Archive’s new Reading Room.

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.'
Opposite
Ian Cartwright and his team at work constructing the Reading Room shelves in October 2011.

A discovery made during the move: documents relating to the Rothschilds’ Royal Mint Refinery.

The Archive Reading Room, which stands at the heart of a striking new building for Rothschild. The latest building to stand on the New Court site was designed by OMA, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, headed by the eminent Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. OMA’s vision for the fourth version of New Court was inspired by the idea of ‘heritage in the City’, and with this in mind, the archive team was involved with the design process from the outset. The Reading Room was always intended to be a key feature of the dramatic modern glass and steel design which opened a view of Christopher Wren’s St Stephen Walbrook church, hidden from the City for so many years. Incorporating the heritage of Rothschild on this site was a significant factor, and the Archive had more than enough heritage to offer. The visibility of the bank’s heritage is now substantial thanks to OMA’s manifestation of the five Rothschild brothers on the Reading Room window. The manifestation can be seen by both employees and visitors, being positioned opposite the bank’s main reception, as a bold statement of a proud heritage. Indeed, the Reading Room actually occupies the space where No.2 New Court originally stood. In 1809 Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777–1836) acquired the lease of No.2, New Court for £750, as a home for his family and as the centre of his London business interests. OMA themselves are no strangers to designing spaces for information services; most notably winning the national American Institute of Architects Honor Award for Architecture in 2005, for the creation of the innovative Seattle Central Library. The Reading Room needed to be a multi-functional space, with the ability to house the Archive’s ever-growing library of books, secondary sources and finding aids. With OMA and Robert Thompson’s joint esteem for heritage, planning commenced. The results were not disappointing.

Robert Thompson’s believe that The Rothschild Archive’s Reading Room is ‘one of its most prestigious, secular commissions of recent times.’19 The bookcases alone used 19 English oaks, took 5,500 hours to produce, and over 1,000 hours to install, a testament in itself of the
conscientiousness and level of workmanship involved. The table, which is two meters in length and comprised of eight oak planks from a further oak tree, weighs three quarters of a tonne, and took ten men to lift and install. Also included in Thompson’s design are pull out book rests with concealed lamps for illumination, lockable drawers to house the most precious books, and seven chairs each with their own mouse motif. The design enables us to accommodate 11 readers at one time around the table, as well as large groups to whom we present some of our most valuable objects, securely and in comfort. The space grants us the opportunity to speak to a variety of individuals and groups about the value of archives, and in particular the vast range of information our collection holds. It is also a suitable venue for workshops and meetings for groups with whom the archive is closely connected, for example AHRC students, King’s College London groups, and those in connection with ‘The Rothschild Scientists’ project, mentioned elsewhere in this review. One such event to which The Rothschild Archive has offered its new facility is in connection with Her Majesty The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee year. ‘The Windsor Dynasty Conference’ led by Matthew Glencross of King’s College London will be a one day conference, hosted by The Rothschild Archive, in November. The conference seeks to explore a hundred years of The House of Windsor through papers by several eminent academics. King George V (1865–1936), the British Monarch responsible for establishing the House of Windsor, often attended social occasions both hosted and attended by the Rothschild family. Indeed the Archive holds many items of Royal memorabilia, predominantly collected by Leopold and Marie de Rothschild, including a very touching letter from the King to Marie upon the death of her husband in 1917. We are very grateful to have such a flexible and inspiring space to work in, which was ultimately achieved through the dedication of the archive staff, and moving team.

The move to new premises was a challenging time for the archive staff. Constant planning, reviewing, packing and unpacking became a way of life for over a year. The move both separated and reunited material; the vast bookcases allow us to display secondary sources and finding aids that had previously been kept in the archive stores due to previous space restrictions. The accessibility of these secondary sources and finding aids is new to both staff and visiting readers, who are encouraged to explore the open bookshelves. Excitingly, the new Reading Room allows us to display more of our artefacts than we had previously been able to. Busts, framed ancient cheques, and tin trunks, once used to safeguard important documents of both the bank and private clients, are now all on display. Both the beauty and the story of these artefacts can be communicated to, and appreciated by, a much wider audience than before.

The new archive store is PD1454.2012 compliant, and in conjunction with the Reading Room, allows the continuing development of The Rothschild Archive. In fact many new accessions to the collection from the bank have been transferred via the Corporate Records Department as a direct consequence of the move. Indeed, it could be said that through the move, the richness of the collection has once again come to light.

One highlight as an archivist is the ability to identify which researcher would benefit from the discovery of an artefact or set of records. During the move a dented tin container marked ‘Royal Mint Refinery’ re-surfaced in our Corporate Records store. Immediately, Michele Blagg, a regular researcher at the archive, sprang to mind. There is nothing quite like the excitement of opening a container, and peering at the contents for the first time. Upon further investigation we learnt that the tin contained thirty-four detailed drawings from 1914 produced by William Huckvale, an Architect from Tring, for a copper plant. Through Michele’s assessment of existing records in the collection, we knew that Rothschild had alluded to a desire to operate a copper establishment. It had been presumed that the existing Refinery site, located near Tower Hill, was unable to accommodate the additional activity. However, the drawings revealed that...
the copper plant was destined to be built on land purchased at Wembly. This solved another mystery over the purchase of the land. Rothschild decided, due to an economic downturn, not to proceed with the new venture and the site was later sold. The ‘find’ expanded both knowledge of the business activities and the decision making process of the Bank. This was just one of various discoveries made during the course of the move which, hopefully in time, will intrigue another researcher or inspire another project for the archive.

The new Reading Room, it is hoped, will be a space of inspiration to scholars, of interest to our patrons, and a secure place for the Archive’s collection to develop. As a team, we hope in the future to continue to receive and welcome researchers and enquiries so that we too can have the opportunity to investigate and learn about the collection further from the comfort of our new Reading Room. Robert Thompson’s own motto is quite pertinent for the space that now optimise the space for both our current and future patrons, and a secure place for the Archive’s collection to develop. As a team, we hope in the future to continue to receive and welcome researchers and enquiries so that we too can have the opportunity to investigate and learn about the collection further from the comfort of our new Reading Room. Robert Thompson’s own motto is quite pertinent for the space that now optimise the space for both our current and future

Below
One of the mice in the Reading Room.

NOTES
1 Clement Clarke Moore, *Twas the night before Christmas* (New York: New York Sentinel, 1823).
2 Ampleforth College was the first Robert Thompson commision thanks to the then headmaster, Father Paul Nevill. Father Nevill was a great patron of Mouseman, and asked Thompson for more works which now include the library, most of the main building and the College houses.
6 65.01/0134 and 0001/0350, *The Ascott Collection. 7 Particular thanks must go to Judith Cooper, our space planner, who worked tirelessly with us to optimise the space for both our current and future collections.
8 Michelle Blagg is a PhD student at King’s College London. Her project is one of the Collaborative Doctoral Awards funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in partnership with the Institute of Contemporary British History and The Rothschild Archive. The project charts the business history of the Royal Mint Refinery, a gold and silver refinery operated by N M Rothschild & Sons from 1893 to 1952.
9 65.01/0134.