

# Review of the year's work

Melanie Aspey, Director of The Rothschild Archive

The nature and extent of research at the Archive continues to develop. Occasionally this is in predictable ways, linked, for example, to anniversaries such as the centenary of the outbreak of World War I or the forthcoming bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo. Even the predictable can produce unexpected results, such as those uncovered by Professor Brian Cathcart in his article on page 11. And then, the unexpected, such as the riches in the Archive available to the historian of the orchid, as revealed by Francesca Murray in her article on page 19. It is the aim of The Rothschild Archive to act as a hub for research into all aspects of the history of the Rothschild family and our London Reading Room provides the most congenial environment for this research to take place. Additionally our 'virtual reading room' – the Archive's website – continues to evolve under the management of Justin Cavernelis-Frost and with the creative support of Natalie Broad.

## Research Project

Our investigations into the lives and work of the members of the Rothschild family who pursued their scientific interests, occasionally in conjunction with a business career, led the project director, Dr Jenni Thomas, down some rewarding research paths. The Archive's exposure to a wide range of new communities as a result of this project has been a most satisfying outcome.

A fruitful relationship has been the partnership with The Royal Society and Kingston University (as reported in the last issue of this *Review*) which brings together historians, archivists and practising scientists to research women's participation in science and learned societies in Britain since 1830, inspired in large measure by our interest in the position of Miriam Rothschild in the scientific pantheon. The project, WISRNet, was formally launched during the 24th International Congress of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine at the University of Manchester in July 2013. The inspiring speech by Professor Ludmilla Jordanova to inaugurate the project is available on the project's website.<sup>1</sup> WISRNet developed a unique shadowing scheme, to pair up historians of science with working women scientists.<sup>2</sup> The historians spent two half days with their allotted scientist to discover more about the nature of their work and the challenges and obstacles before them in a scientific career. Aside from bringing a deeper understanding of the field to the historians, these conversations encouraged the scientists to reflect on their achievements, their hopes and expectations.

The Archive hosted two meetings of the WISRNet Steering Committee during the year.

## Outreach

The Archivist, Justin Cavernelis-Frost, participated in a local history festival in Aston Clinton, in the heartland of the Vale of Aylesbury where the Rothschild family began their long association in the middle of the nineteenth century. Conversations which began at that event led to the happy collaboration between the Archive and the Trustees of The Anthony Hall in Aston Clinton on the work to repair, copy and display the joint portrait of Constance and Annie de Rothschild, benefactors of Aston Clinton.<sup>3</sup>

RHS awards won by Lionel de Rothschild for orchids and cymbidiums. RAL 000/2227

The Director of the Archive made a presentation at a colloquium held by the Institute of Art & Law in London in January 2014. The colloquium was dedicated to the subject of restitution of works of art.

## Exhibitions

The Archive enjoys the opportunity to display some items from the collection in contexts which emphasise their significance. A recent acquisition, a gift from the estate of the late Leopold de Rothschild, was lent to Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, which held a retrospective exhibition on the career of René Lalique, the first to be held in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup>

## Visits

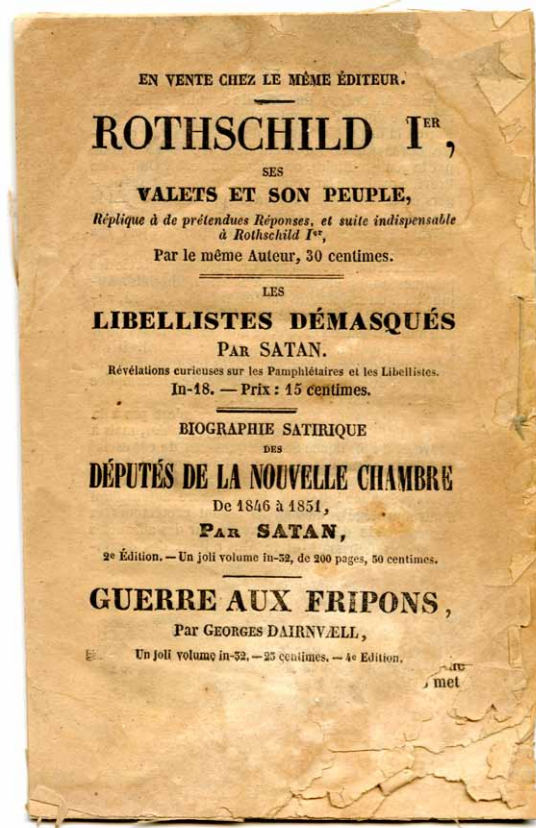
*The Archive welcomed numerous special interest groups from the international archive community.*

- Several members of the staff of The Parliamentary Archives visited The Rothschild Archive at New Court and were warm and generous hosts in return during our visit in April 2013.
- Archivists from the Salvation Army were welcomed to the Archive in December 2013.
- In June 2013 a group of members of the Vereinigte Westfälische Adelsarchive e.V. came to the Archive during their visit to the UK. The organisation was established in 1923 to ensure the preservation of the archives of family estates, to ensure their development and to make the resources available to researchers.
- The Director visited Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge in July 2013 at the invitation of the Master of Churchill College. The Centre's director, Allen Packwood, highlighted the many points of contact between the Rothschild and Churchill families in evidence in the collection.

## Archives at Roubaix

In March 2014 the Chairman of The Rothschild Archive Trust, Baron Eric de Rothschild, and the Director together visited the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail (ANMT) in Roubaix, where the archives of the French family's activities are held on deposit. The Archive plans to carry on further research into the collections over the coming months and years, building on the cataloguing work that has already taken place by the staff at Roubaix and by employees and contractors of the Archive. The catalogue is accessible on the website of the ANMT with a link from the Archive's site.<sup>5</sup>





### Future plans

The Archive looks forward to working with colleagues from the Frankfurt Jewish Museum, which will close for a period of two years from summer 2015, as they develop their concept for the interpretation of the history of the Jews of Frankfurt in a new gallery. The Museum is currently housed in a former Rothschild property on the Untermainkai, which will be the base of the Museum's future permanent exhibitions.

The staff of the Archive looks forward to developing knowledge of the collections on deposit at the ANMT in Roubaix, and to making them better known to the research community.

*Above, from left*  
Back cover from the 1846 attack on the Rothschilds. See p.12.  
RAL 000/1604

Surviving papers of the Jewish War Services Committee. See p.36.  
RAL 000/358

### NOTES

1 [www.womeninscience.net/?page\\_id=297](http://www.womeninscience.net/?page_id=297)

2 [www.womeninscience.net/?page\\_id=462](http://www.womeninscience.net/?page_id=462)

3 Illustrated on page 56.

4 [www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/exhibitions/rené-lalique-1860-1945](http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/exhibitions/rené-lalique-1860-1945)

5 [www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/camt/](http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/camt/) and [www.rothschildarchive.org/collections/history\\_of\\_the\\_collections/history\\_of\\_the\\_business\\_records\\_of\\_de\\_rothschild\\_freres\\_paris](http://www.rothschildarchive.org/collections/history_of_the_collections/history_of_the_business_records_of_de_rothschild_freres_paris)

## Nathan Rothschild and the Battle of Waterloo

Brian Cathcart explores an enduring myth about a key period in Rothschild history.



That Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777–1836) was the first person in London to know of Wellington's victory at Waterloo in 1815 has been asserted so often it is widely accepted as a historical fact. No less a historian than Elizabeth Longford repeated the claim in her great biography of the Duke in the 1970s, and more recently it appeared in Niall Ferguson's official history of the Rothschild family.<sup>1</sup> A second assertion is just as widely known: that Rothschild exploited his exclusive knowledge to make a killing on the Stock Exchange, probably employing some kind of deception to augment his profits. Versions of this have appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Dictionary of National Biography*, in scores of histories of Waterloo, of the Stock Exchange and of British Jewry, in works on business practice and intelligence, and in novels.<sup>2</sup> In a more sinister vein it formed the basis of a 1940 Nazi propaganda film, *Die Rothschilds: Aktien auf Waterloo*, and it continues to find favour on neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic websites.