

WELCOME!

Welcome to the second issue of Business History Explorer's *News Update*, published to update subscribers and others on developments at BHE – the online bibliography of the history of UK businesses and industries. Why *Update*? Because BHE is very much a work in progress.

Since our last issue we have continued to add newly published works and to fill in gaps. We are well on our way to reaching our target of having a database of 40,000 items by the end of 2015 – monographs, chapters within monographs, dissertations, unpublished works, selected product literature and, by November, periodical articles. As subscribers will know, periodical articles are currently excluded from the bibliography.

Our preoccupation in the last six months has been to build a file of periodical article titles for uploading into BHE in late 2015. By then it will include about 10,000 items, for the most part collected on a selective basis.

A small group of highly relevant periodicals – such as *Business History*, *Business Archives* and *Economic History Review* – is being reviewed for relevant material on a systematic basis. A very much larger periodical group is being looked at far less comprehensively, from which only selected titles (determined by quality and subject) will be added to BHE.

So at the end of 2015 we will have a powerful and unrivalled resource for locating publications covering the history of UK business and industry. It is relevant to a very wide range of researchers.

The range is wide because businesses touch and influence every aspect of our lives. Most of us work for them. Some of us have an ownership stake in them. A few of us direct them at the top while many more of us work for them at the bottom! They manage our pensions, bury our bodies, organise our holidays and cut our hair. They generate our electricity and distribute our water and gas. They get us to our destination by all means of transport. They lend us money and insure our lives. They design and build our houses. They make our furniture, the plates we eat off, the glasses we drink from, the clocks we tell the time by. And as with us, so with our ancestors. Business history – and BHE! – is of use to historians of all persuasions.

REVIEWING CONTENT OF LOCAL HISTORY RESOURCES

An ambition of BHE is to collect information about hard-to-find publications that have escaped the legal deposit libraries. Local history libraries are full of these and, as time permits, we are paying them visits and interrogating their online catalogues.

Many readers will know of these outstanding collections which have been accumulated by dedicated local studies librarians over the last 75 years. They have been assiduous in identifying much published by, or which relates to, local businesses, especially small ones.

These include such items as booklets about plant openings; trade catalogues; guides to local industry exhibitions popular between the wars and into the 1950s; promotional brochures giving a snapshot of a business at a point in its history; typescript and sometimes manuscript essays by local historians; memoirs of local businessmen. The list is as varied as it is long.

In making these surveys the extent to which the local library service is under pressure from expenditure cuts – reflected in shortened opening hours and reduced staff levels – is ever apparent. Some, of course, thrive but more face an uncertain future and deserve far better.

Theses

BHE currently holds bibliographical details of about 2,500 theses that touch on business or industrial history, either by being an historical study or by being an account of a business or industry at a point in time. The clear majority of these are PhDs or DPhils (c1,550) and MPhils (c220). Other categories include MAs (c530), MScs (c120), MLitts (c65) and MComs (c30), most of the latter having been awarded by Birmingham University between the wars and in the 1950s for pioneering studies of Midlands industries.

A few BA dissertations are also included in BHE, but only when these have been cited in academic works or where copies have been lodged in local studies libraries.

While it is fairly easy to locate doctoral theses in specialised databases, the same cannot be said for most other categories of masters theses, MPhils and MLitts being the exception. One

reason for this is that several UK universities fail to record such theses in library catalogues. Whilst recognising that the quality and extent of these might vary substantially and that the resources required for their cataloguing would be considerable, it nevertheless must be the case that a lot of very good research never sees the light of day.

GEORGE MEASOM' RAILWAY GUIDES

The finest railway guides published in the mid-nineteenth century were those of George Measom. These fat tomes – not unlike the later Bradshaw's of Portillo fame – describe places of interest on railway routes – city centres, municipal buildings, great country houses, fine churches and the like. But Measom also had an eye for prominent commercial buildings erected by cutting-edge businesses; he identified these as places for passenger visits.

He therefore provided descriptions of business premises together with the processes that went on in them; these were often several pages long and invariably included at least one illustration. Some of course were showrooms, shops, wine cellars and breweries,

but the mix was extremely varied and also included rolling mills, engineering works, metal bashing plant, leather tanning works – not quite the places one would expect railway passengers to queue up to visit.

These descriptions are full of interesting detail for historians especially as most of these businesses – leaders in their day – have long been consigned to history. BHE is, therefore, recording the larger 'chapters' as time permits – such obscure writings are exactly the content that BHE seeks to hold.

So far some 150 Measom entries have been added. The content of his *Official Illustrated Guide to the Great Northern Railway*, published 1861, is a typical serendipity that includes the Carriage Works of J Cockshoot of Manchester; Foster's General Furnishing Warehouse at Nottingham; the Silverplated & Britannia Metal Works of James Dixon & Sons of Sheffield; Thos. Agnew's Fine Art Repository at Manchester; and Rotherham Iron Works of G & G Brown, locomotive builders.

All enquiries to bibliography@businessarchivescouncil.org.uk

INFORMATION ABOUT BUSINESS HISTORY EXPLORER

What is BHE?

- It is an online bibliography of the history of UK businesses and industries, including ones based outside the UK
- It is a work in progress currently containing c28,000 entries and due to rise to c40,000 in 2015
- It contains publications relating to 14,000 businesses and industries
- Its content comprises monographs, chapters within monographs, dissertations, unpublished manuscripts and some product literature. Periodical articles will be added in 2015
- Its search functionality enables searching for publications by industrial sector (to two levels) and by geographical area (to four levels)
- It is available in hard copy (with no indexes) current to March 2012

Why subscribe to BHE?

- It is the only bibliography of its kind
- It is increasingly comprehensive and includes all categories of publication, not just monographs
- It focuses on the very large volume of privately printed and otherwise hard-to-find publications which have escaped notice in mainstream library catalogues and other bibliographies

- It is relevant to a wide range of historical studies in which business has a role to play – design and decorative arts; architecture and construction; genealogy and the family; urban development and the environment; science and technology; historical geography and local studies; transport and agriculture; economic and business history
- Its search capabilities facilitate studies of specific towns or counties and of specific economic activities

Who is behind BHE?

- John Orbell and Richard Storey, retired archivists with strong interests in business archives and history have compiled the content
- The project has been financially supported by the Business Archives Council (BAC), a membership organisation which encourages the preservation of business archives and the study of business history (www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk)
- The publisher is Taylor's End Press, an imprint of John Orbell
- BHE is the successor to Francis Goodall, *A Bibliography of British Business Histories*, 1987

How to subscribe to BHE?

- By cheque
- By BACS payment
- By credit card
- For further details go to businesshistoryexplorer.co.uk

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