

Pamela Hunter, Archivist, C.Hoare & Co. (bankers)

In many ways, entering C Hoare & Co is like passing into a different world as the busy pavements of Fleet Street are replaced by ticking clocks and oak-panelled walls. David Garrick's portrait looks kindly down as I have a quick glance at the calendar over coffee and see that today's researcher wants to look through the bank accounts of an early 18th century baronet for clues as to which architect-builder might have been responsible for remodelling the family seat. No sooner are they settled with the first of the many bulky volumes they'll need to look at (though at least the clerk's handwriting is beautifully legible) than the conservator arrives with some newly-cleaned and repaired maps and plans, including a colourful 17th century estate map, and a poster advertising the sale of a 'A Very Important Freehold Estate adjacent to the town of Castle Cary [Somerset]'. We survey the ongoing ledger rebinding programme and decide it will take another four years just to reach the end of the first corridor – a somewhat daunting thought.

After lunch, to the strains of the piano tuner busily preparing the Steinway in the next room for an evening reception, I photograph some newly-acquired items, including a Hoare & Co Brewery beer bottle donated by a member of the public who came across it in an online auction, then check the wording on captions for the proposed new company website. A customer telephones: what is 320/-10s-6d worth in today's money? The researcher departs, his mystery solved.

Then, just as the afternoon starts to wind down, another telephone call. Is there anything flora and fauna related that could be put out on display for this evening? After some digging about a letter written on board HMS Beagle is decided upon, together with Sir Richard Colt Hoare's private ledger showing payment of his annual membership fees to the Linnean Society. Finally, there's just time to confirm with the National Trust at Stourhead House, Wiltshire, (built by the Hoare family in the 1720s and owned by them for the next 200 years) that I'll be down in the morning with the loan items for their new exhibition, before the clocks wheeze out the hour and it's time to say goodnight to Mr Garrick and return to 21st century London once more.