

## Business Archives Council Newsletter

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The editor of this newsletter is Benjamin White. The next issue will appear in Autumn 2017. Prospective copy should be sent to Benjamin White, email: [Benjamin.White@bankofengland.co.uk](mailto:Benjamin.White@bankofengland.co.uk)

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## Chair's blog

It's hard to believe that we're almost half way through the year and that I'm writing my summer blog! On the BAC Chair's front, the last few months have been relatively quiet, which is just as well as there has been plenty to keep me occupied in the day job.

One event that I should mention was the Archive & Records Association's Section for Business Records (SBR) Summer Seminar. This was hosted by Peel Holdings at their offices in the Trafford Centre, Manchester and the theme was *Promoting your archive*. There was an excellent range of speakers, including some old friends of the BAC, and 'yours truly' chaired a roundtable session to finish things off. Several interesting points came up during the various discussions. One question was whether business archivists are reactive or proactive? I attempted to occupy both worlds by saying that we are reactive in a proactive way, and I happen to think that there is a lot in this. There was also a good debate about the degree of interpretation which might be undertaken by business archivists. The conclusion was that yes this can be important but there was a strong feeling that we definitely did not want to be 'storytellers'.

All in all then, this was a stimulating day with inspiring speakers, great case studies and plenty of opportunities to network and catch-up on the gossip. The ideal scenario for a business archivist

you might think. However, I was left wondering if we (both BAC and SBR) should be widening our scope and ambition? Are we in danger of preaching to the converted and not doing enough to target businesses which don't have an archive or an archivist? Let's face it, we can all think of sectors which are under-represented in archival terms. More work is needed here I think, and perhaps an opportunity to press the view that I expressed in the Archives Unlocked strategy 'think piece' that archives can create economic growth.

Over the next couple of weeks I will be speaking at a workshop in Paris on the important subject of appraisal in the digital era, run by the European Association for Banking and Financial History. Then it's up to Glasgow for the annual conference of the Association of Business Historians. And I'm hoping to visit a business archive too – watch this space next time!

Looking further ahead the planning for this year's BAC Conference is well underway, and we are also thinking about the potential impact on business archives of the EU General Data Protection Regulation. And don't forget that there is just about time to apply for the two BAC Cataloguing Grants. In the meantime, enjoy the summer sun!

**Mike Anson**

BAC Chair

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## Welcome to new members

Michael Weatherburn

## The new kid on the block: Nationwide Historical Archives

A brand new corporate archive came on the scene in 2016: Nationwide Historical Archives. Like many organisations, Nationwide had been keeping archives for years, but with no professional archivist - and that makes all the difference. The situation changed with the appointment of a new CEO in Spring 2016. Joe Garner arrived to take over the reins after spells in charge at BT Openreach and HSBC UK. In both these jobs he had been impressed by the archive services and what they added to the business. In his first week at Nationwide he asked to meet the archivist. 'What archivist?' was the response. Without further ado his team were sent away to recruit a suitable person.

By October 2016, the new archives team was up and running. One of our first tasks was to get to grips with the various accumulations of 'old stuff', but we also found an immediate desire within the organisation to tell their story in a much more powerful way. The bulk of the historical archives were being stored in an administrative centre in Northampton, in a 'cage' in the basement – where else?! This cage was full of the key records for many of the societies that Nationwide had merged with on its journey from a small London building society to the biggest building society in the world. There were the usual minute books and annual reports, leavened with early mortgage registers, photographs and memorabilia – all under a layer of dust. Somebody in the past had had the

foresight to bring the archive collections together, organising them by their original businesses, but it looked like they had moved locations at least once and lost some of their order along the way. A priority job was moving everything nearer to head office in Swindon to do some preliminary sorting and familiarise ourselves with the archives so we could start talking about our history in an authoritative way.



*Poster used in Nationwide's national advertising campaign starring items from the archives (Image courtesy of Nationwide Building Society)*

There was also a profile-raising job to be done and we killed two birds with one stone by getting a time-lapse film made of us packing up the archives at Northampton, set to music and then tweeted via Nationwide's feed. At a higher level, we set up meetings with key internal stakeholders to introduce ourselves and discuss how the new archive service could support the different parts of the business.

We've made a good start. The vast majority of the archives are now in a warehouse in Swindon and sorted according to provenance; there are professional procedures in place around their storage and use. We've begun a volunteer programme for interested employees. There was extensive input to a major employee event in January this year when 80 per cent of our employees gathered at the NEC in Birmingham over five days to learn about our new strategy. The event will go down in Nationwide history as one of those 'I was there!' moments as the strategy was brought to life through a series of presentations which included singing, dancing and poetry – and every day started with a session which brought our heritage to life and emphasised how our past underpins our present. The archives are also making their mark in Nationwide's external brand-building. Images and information from the archives are featuring in marketing posters and external communications - we used a quote from our 1901 annual report in our official response to the recent Housing White Paper. You may also have seen our latest TV adverts with the poet Jo Bell, whose poem was inspired by the story of Mr Cooper, our founding father. The national poster campaign to support the advert made the archives the star of the show and put them in the window of nearly every branch.

Where next? There are three items on our wish list: get CALM installed so we can start proper cataloguing; begin collecting current records for the archives; and, finally the big one, develop a proper store and visitors' space within head office, that will be accessible and engaging to employees, members, researchers and the wider community. We're out of the blocks but there's still some way to go yet.

**Sara Kinsey and Liz Clifton-Page**

Historical Archives, Nationwide Building Society

## Save the Date! BAC Conference 2017

The BAC's annual conference, titled *Change the Record*, and evening Wadsworth Prize will be held in London on Tuesday 21st November.

Keep an eye on the [BAC website](#) for further details...

## Reminder: BAC arts grant 2017 deadline approaching

A reminder that the BAC is offering a cataloguing grant of £3,000 specifically for business archives related to the arts. This grant is in addition to the BAC's main cataloguing grant for business collections.

The deadline for applications is 27 July 2017. For more information on how to apply, see the BAC's website at [www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/activitiesobjectives/catgrantarts/](http://www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/activitiesobjectives/catgrantarts/)

The aims of the grant are to support an under-represented area of business archives and to complement wider initiatives for archiving the arts by The National Archives (TNA) and the Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives. In addition, it aims to:

- Provide financial support for institutions/businesses that manage business archives related to the arts,
- Reach collections that have not yet been prioritised but have potential academic or socio-historical value,
- Create opportunities for archivists or para-professionals/volunteers to gain experience in listing business collections,
- Make more arts-related business collections accessible.

We envisage that the £3,000 grant will be used over the equivalent of a SIX-week period to fund an archive intern or temporary staff member (under professional supervision) to catalogue a discrete collection of business records. This work should produce either a detailed catalogue of a small collection or a top-level catalogue of a more substantial collection. Grant recipients should provide the BAC with an article for its newsletter, and the catalogue should be made available on TNA's DISCOVERY database.

We welcome applications from a range of organisations including (but not limited to) businesses, local record offices, universities, museums, charities, specialised repositories and other organisations that hold business archives of, for example: theatre/film/dance/music/animation companies, art galleries, publishing houses, production companies, photographic/sound recording studios, festivals, heritage companies, tourist attractions etc.

Applicants who have previously applied to the arts grant or the main cataloguing grant for business archives are welcome to apply. Please note that the BAC would not normally award a grant to the same institution within three years.

If you have any questions about this grant please contact Anne Archer, Administrator, BAC Arts Cataloguing Grant at: [artscataloguinggrant@businessarchivescouncil.org.uk](mailto:artscataloguinggrant@businessarchivescouncil.org.uk)

## **UNESCO Memory of the World: Call for nominations to the UK Register**

UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme seeks to encourage the preservation of, access to and awareness of the world's documentary heritage. An important part of the Programme is its Registers, which recognise documentary heritage of outstanding significance. Successful inscriptions have been able to use this prestigious award in funding bids, to raise awareness of documentary heritage, and to improve the management of collections. The current inscriptions on the UK Register and information about the UK Committee can be found at:

[www.unesco.org.uk/designation/memory-of-the-world-inscriptions-in-the-uk-uk-register/](http://www.unesco.org.uk/designation/memory-of-the-world-inscriptions-in-the-uk-uk-register/)

Detailed information about the Programme is available at:

[www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/homepage/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/homepage/)

Nominations are now being invited for inscriptions to the UK Register in 2018. Any organisation or individual may make a submission for any form of documentary heritage for which they are responsible. The key criterion is that the heritage is of outstanding significance to the UK.

Applications should be made by submitting the official application form along with specified supporting documentation. The application process is designed to be straightforward and is supported by a handbook which applicants are encouraged to read. Both can be found at:

[www.unesco.org.uk/apply-to-the-memory-of-the-world-register-uk-international/](http://www.unesco.org.uk/apply-to-the-memory-of-the-world-register-uk-international/)

All enquiries should be made to:

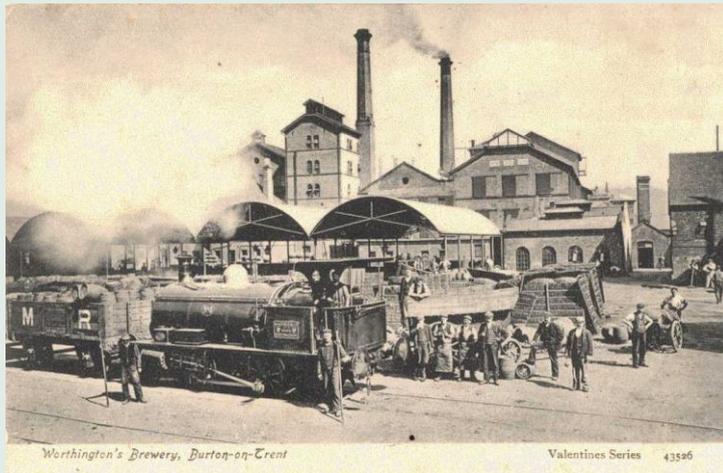
**Matthew McMurray** (Secretary) [matthew.mcmurray@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](mailto:matthew.mcmurray@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)

**Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan** (Chair) [elizabeth@elizabethoc.co.uk](mailto:elizabeth@elizabethoc.co.uk)

The closing date for applications is Wednesday 31 January 2018. Applicants will be notified of the outcome in May 2018 and inscriptions will be publicly presented in June 2018 at a formal awards ceremony.

## Rolling the barrel: brewing archives, railway transport

In early 2016 I realised that my explorations of railways' business history could be enriched through using a wider range of archival material, and the Business Archives Council's (BAC) bursary for business history research has been invaluable in this pursuit. Until recently my work had taken a top-down approach to the industry's history before 1914, where primarily official and related files were used to examine companies' fortunes. Yet, such records came with all the biases, prejudices and self-congratulatory back-slapping railway company officials and directors might be apt to do. They often lacked adequate self-criticism of operations, might paint an unduly rosy picture of a situation, or may only mention in passing what railway customers thought of the availability, price and quality of the services they used. Building on other scholars' work, my objective was therefore to develop a more rounded picture of railways' business history before 1914, to demonstrate where the policies and practices of railway companies influenced or were influenced by users' expectations and experiences of transport services.



*Another big rail user – Worthington's Brewery, Burton-on-Trent, c.1900 (Image courtesy of the National Brewery Centre Archive)*

Rather than focus on passenger users, I decided to examine how before 1914 an industry used railway services to send and receive goods, their opinions on the service they received, and how this affected their financial and operational performance. The chosen industry needed to regularly use rail transport, have some options to shift distribution to another transport mode (boat, canal or later in the period road), and naturally considerable archives needed to have survived. Because it fulfilled all these criteria, and because I had a personal interest, the brewing industry was chosen. My research particularly focusses on two breweries that used the railways in very different ways, therefore providing the opportunity to compare two patterns of usage. Bass, Ratcliffe & Gretton of Burton-upon-Trent exploited the arrival of the railways fully from the 1840s to build up a national business through agencies. Whitbread & Co, a major porter brewery that had largely focussed on the London trade since the eighteenth century, used the railways (and coastal shipping and the road) from 1891 to build up a nationwide network of bottling stores and depots.

Work is ongoing, but a principal finding is that the brewing industry's relationship with the railways was tempestuous, and from the 1860s the former became progressively dissatisfied with the services they received. High rates stymied the expansion of some breweries and dissuaded others from using rail (although Bass seemed to have no problem). Brewers also complained about delivery times and the frequent damage and theft of barrels and bottles in transit. Given this situation, and unless locked into using the railway – like Bass was from the 1860s, given it built its own private railway – brewers remained flexible when distributing beer. As Whitbread did when expanding its bottling operation, they frequently switched their distribution operation between rail, boat and then from 1900 road, when they could get better price and service. This therefore suggests the railways' declining fortunes after 1914, when much traffic shifted to road, had its origins before then. Railways had a long history of not meeting users' needs, and thus modal shift to road was driven by multiple factors, not just the cost reductions this would bring.

Without the BAC bursary these and other findings would have not come to light. It covered my travel to The National Archives to examine the railways' files, but principally it has facilitated trips to the National Brewery Centre in Burton-on-Trent, where files of Bass and other major breweries are held. The BAC bursary will also hopefully have a longer-term impact, and I hope this research will

be a launch-pad for a wider study of the relationship between the railways and their industrial customers before 1914.

**Dr David Turner**

Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of York

## Professor John Armstrong

The Council greatly regrets to report the death of John Armstrong, a former Hon Editor and Hon Treasurer of the BAC, on 12 February 2017 at the age of 72. John had been unwell for some time but he remained a strong supporter of the BAC and his positive outlook never failed.

John's modesty was such that it is only now that his importance as a historian is being acknowledged. A graduate of the LSE, he began his career with a strong interest in business history. With Derek Oddy he hosted the Ealing Business History Seminars, which were a distinctive feature of 'business history' life in Britain before the Business History Unit was created in 1978. He achieved much in this field, as for example his work on the role of British company promoters in the collection *Capitalism in a mature economy*, edited by Cassis and Van Helten (1990). At the same time, he developed his interest in transport history, where in the 1970s he was a founding member of the Transport History Group, whose remit was to bring together all those interested in the study of transport, whether professional or amateur. In 1989 he took on the editorship of the *Journal of Transport History*, succeeding Gerard Turnbull and Terry Gourvish, a task which he carried out for over a decade, editing the 40th anniversary number in 1993.

Undoubtedly John's major academic achievements were in maritime history, where he specialised in the study of coastal shipping. His contribution as convenor of the regular King's College London maritime history seminars was immense. In his own work he did much to highlight the important role which coastal shipping made to the growth of the British economy, even after the completion of the railway network. His earliest efforts were co-written with his mentor Philip Bagwell as contributions to the Freeman and Aldcroft volumes on *Transport in the Industrial Revolution* (1983) and *Transport in Victorian Britain* (1988). He then published several books – notably *Coastal Shipping and the European economy 1750-1980*, edited with Andreas Kunz (2002) and *The Impact of technological change: the early steamship in Britain*, with David Williams (2011) - and over 60 academic articles. Seventeen of those articles were reprinted in a collection entitled *The Vital Spark: the British coastal trade 1700-1930* (2009). His other ventures included a review of urban transport in London (2000), and the *Companion to British Road Haulage History*, which he co-edited in 2003.

Somehow John also found time to play a central part in the BAC's work. Always a champion of business archives, his first work for the Council was his membership of the Publications Working Party (PWP). The PWP was set up in the mid-1980s under the chairmanship of Tom Ingram and later John Orbell, who remembers him as 'a very energetic and creative member' of the group. From this sprang his book, co-authored with Stephanie Jones, on *Business Documents: their*

*origins, sources and uses in historical research* (1987) and also the first edition of the BAC's *Directory of Corporate Archives* (1985).

We were extremely fortunate to bring John's skills and ideas on board when he became the BAC's Hon Editor in 1983. A highlight of his tenure was his research on the origins of the Council, a vital contribution to Peter Mathias's article celebrating BAC's 60th anniversary in 1994. That article has become the authoritative account of why, when and how the Council began its long march. Then in 1988 John moved across to the very different role of Hon Treasurer, a key part of the BAC's management. The treasurership was a hands-on task which included the monthly meetings of the chairman's committee and authorship of the annual accounts. John's diligence and his warm friendship with our chairman, Sam Twining, were great assets in his service as Treasurer between 1988 and 2001. He also continued to take a keen interest in the Council's ongoing research, surveys of business archives, events and publications. Alison Turton, editor of *Managing Business Archives* (1991), remembers how John gave his time and expertise very freely to that BAC project and also contributed a chapter on the development of British business and company law. He 'understood very well what business archivists needed to know from business historians ... His contribution stood the test of time'.

John will be remembered first and foremost for being a kind, supportive and selfless team-player, whose numerous collaborations are testimony to his generosity and friendship in archives and scholarship.

**Terry Gourvish and Edwin Green**

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