



Business Archives Council Newsletter

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The editor of this newsletter is Ben White. The next issue will appear in Winter 2020. Prospective copy should be sent to Ben White, email: benjamin.white@bankofengland.co.uk

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Chair's blog

The last time I penned this blog I described blue skies and birdsong while seated in the Chair's Lockdown Bunker. Well the weather is now distinctly cold, wet and windy, and there has been some easing of restrictions, but we're seemingly still a long way from normality. Whatever normal might now be.

Nonetheless, the BAC has been able to continue its activities in these changed circumstances. For example, we are now holding more frequent meetings of Trustees courtesy of the now ubiquitous Zoom. We have also held a series of online discussions for members covering various issues raised by the coronavirus pandemic. Separately, I convened a meeting of colleagues from

the main banking and financial archives. It was good to share thoughts about our experiences, and we discovered that there was a lot in common here. It was apparent that returning to work, and even more so reopening to researchers, is still some way off. Actually, in recent weeks I have been able to get into the Archive on one day a week. It was great to be back with the records and to be able to answer some enquiries! The City was very quiet though – I was able to stand in the middle of Bartholomew Lane at lunchtime to take this picture.



(Courtesy Mike Anson)

One good piece of news is that representatives from the BAC and The National Archives recently met with the Insolvency Practitioners Association. Some of you may remember that this was one of the action points originally raised in the *National Strategy For Business Archives* back in 2009 – so it's taken rather a long time to organise the meeting! Anyway, it was an extremely useful conversation and hopefully it will result in the adoption of agreed best practice guidelines. Continuing the lobbying theme, we made a submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors. The report and evidence can be found through this link, though I have to say the archive sector doesn't receive much attention: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/250/impact-of-covid19-on-dcms-sectors/publications/>

You will all be aware of the campaigning and debates around the Black Lives Matter network. This has manifested itself across many areas, not least in pointing the spotlight on the historic behaviour of businesses in relation to the slave trade and colonial activities. In the archive sector more widely there have been some heated discussions about diversity, and more particularly

racism, within records. This is a critical issue and it is one which we will be addressing at the BAC Conference in November (see details and the call for papers elsewhere). There is much to do, but if businesses are going to have to be more transparent about their past, and I think they are, then business archives will have a key role to play.

Mike Anson
BAC Chair

Collections in crisis: 10 years of the Crisis Management Team

In 2007 – 2008 the global economy experienced the biggest financial crisis since the depression of the 1930s. Within a year, almost 800,000 UK businesses had closed. The retail sector was particularly hard hit and over a short period of time a number of household names disappeared from the high street, including Woolworths, Borders, Comet, Dolcis, MFI, Zavvi, C&A, to name but a few. This is the context in which *The National Strategy for Business Archives* was launched in England and Wales in 2009. One of the key elements of the strategy involved setting up a three-person Crisis Management Team to respond to the avalanche of business closures and the volume of records at risk as a result. By 2011, the team had expanded to include representatives from Scotland and today is comprised of archivists, academic historians and other specialists with an interest in business history. Yet the core function remains the same: to co-ordinate efforts to preserve business records in cases of liquidations, administrations, takeovers and other circumstances where records may be in danger.

The methodology employed by the team is relatively straightforward. Team members monitor national, local and trade newspapers for articles on business closures, gather information on insolvency practitioners through the Gazette, and use their own contacts and direct approaches from businesses and employees to gather information on records at risk. The team communicates via email and maintains a collaborative spreadsheet recording each case, its status and outcome. Where records are deemed to be at risk, the team member best suited to deal with the particular case will attempt to make contact with the business itself and, in the case of insolvency, the insolvency practitioner. Ideally, the next steps are: establish what records exist, identify a suitable public repository willing to accept them, and, finally assist with arranging their deposit.

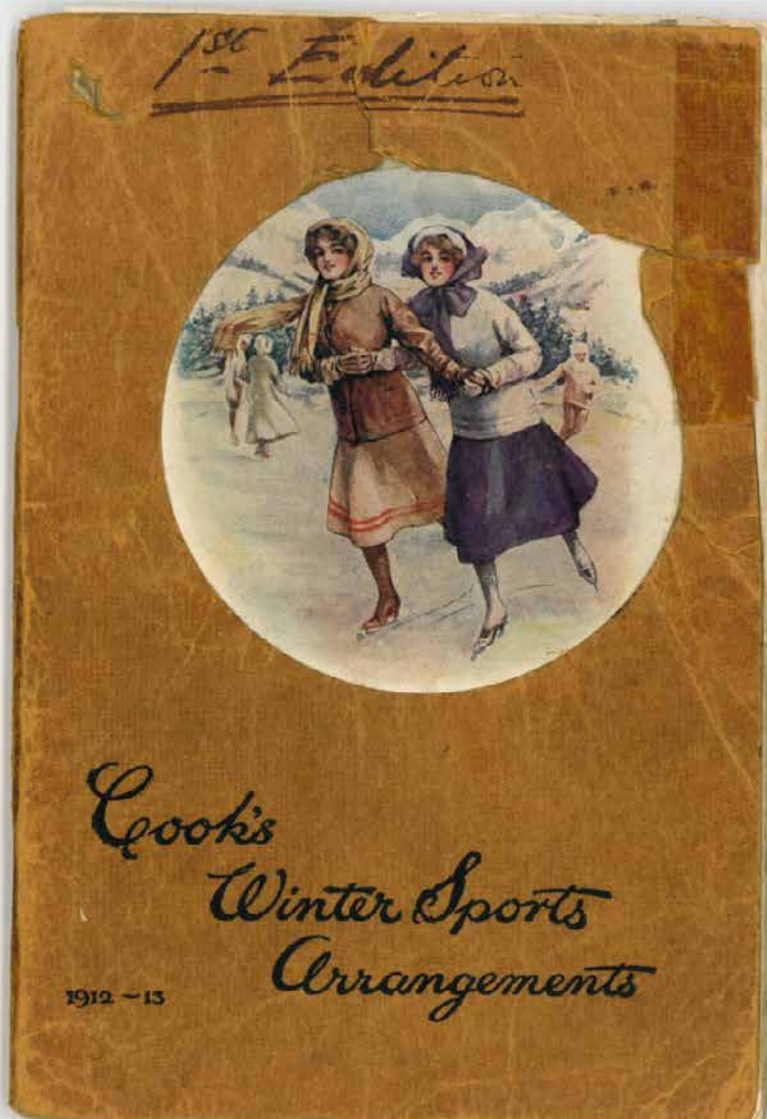
However, in practice the process is seldom as simple. There are two common barriers to rescuing at-risk records. First is the challenge of working with insolvency practitioners who, as you would expect, are entirely focussed realising as much value from the business as possible. Usually this results in polite rejections to offers of assistance from the team or, more often, ignored emails and unreturned phone calls. However, in cases where a dialogue can be established, and a positive outcome for the records achieved, this can lead to an ongoing relationship with an individual insolvency practitioner; an invaluable contact to have when it comes to crisis management.

The second barrier is the question of repository capacity. The first question almost all archives asked when offered a rescued collection is, 'how big is it?' In England and Wales around 75% of deposited business collections are held by local authorities, many of which are struggling after a decade of budget cuts. In Scotland there is a more even split between university, local authority and national repositories but space is still an issue. Closely related to this is the issue of use. The

successful exploitation of a business collection requires a degree of skill and expertise – the ability to read accounts, for example – and, as a result, business collections are often less well-used than other collections. The prospect of accepting a large collection which will rarely be taken off the shelves is not particularly appealing to an archive that is close to being full.

The scale of these challenges becomes apparent on looking at the figures. Between 2009 and 2019 there were 138 cases recorded by the crisis management team. 25 of those cases resulted in a successful deposit, a return of just under 20%. Some of these cases take years to conclude involving protracted negotiations, others are managed swiftly with the full support of both the business and insolvency practitioner.

Despite these challenges, the team has been involved in a number of successful deposits over the last ten years. The latest success story for the crisis management team was the successful transfer of the Thomas Cook archive to the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), with the team working alongside the Business Archives Council to first ensure that the records were safe from sale before coordinating a bidding process between interested public repositories. The records are now safely in Leicestershire; an excellent result with which to celebrate ten years of the Crisis Management Team. ROLLR is now applying for funding to catalogue the collection to make it accessible for the future (further information on the Thomas Cook archive can also be found on the Managing Business Archives website).



(Courtesy the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland)

In the decade to come the Crisis Management Team is clearly facing a whole host of new challenges. We have only just begun to grapple with what a records rescue looks like in the digital world. We also have a long way to go in ensuring that the business records we capture

reflect the diverse society we live in. And, of course, the twin trials of Brexit and Covid-19; both of which will potentially mean that the next ten years are very busy indeed for the Crisis Management Team.

Christopher Cassells
Crisis Management Team

The archive scrubs up well! Recent experiences of John Lewis Partnership's Heritage Services

When thinking about the huge changes which have occurred over the last few months it would be easy to point out the challenges which archives have had to face. However, for John Lewis Partnership's Heritage Services this has been, on the whole, a very positive experience which I hope others share.

Being attached to a Communications team was the first real advantage. It was always clear that this wider team would be crucial in delivering corporate messaging and was, therefore, not subject to the tough furlough decisions which some other business archives faced. We did have to make the initial, very difficult decision, to place some of our team on furlough but, after understanding the reasoning behind this, the team members who stood down accepted this was the best option at the time and we moved forward with a smaller skeleton team who continued to work throughout lock-down.

One of the greatest positives, which surprised us, was the initial reaction of the business. Although a very small cog in a very big wheel it became apparent that the value we brought by being able to describe how the business had managed previous dramatic changes in trade was considered important both from a record keeping and a morale boosting point of view.

Our first pieces of work focussed on telling the stories of overcoming adversity and how flexibly and positively staff in the past had risen to the challenges. We used our internal systems to post comments and stories and were also asked to feed into wider Communication projects to ensure that everyone could take comfort from our past experiences.



*A Partner at John Lewis' curtain factory in Lancashire making up scrubs for the NHS in April 2020
(Courtesy John Lewis Partnership, Heritage Services)*

On the record keeping front I was surprised that from the middle of March senior directors encouraged their teams to engage with us to make sure we were capturing the records of the exceptional work, particularly that our Waitrose Partners were undertaking. Given that we are one of the few national supermarket chains with an active archive it was acknowledged that our records would be of great value in the future and we used this as a key lever to ensure teams across the business kept us informed of their approaches to the pandemic.

Obviously this expanded our remit from the recipients of information to key players in the management of current records. This was greatly enhanced by our ability to ensure any records were uploaded directly onto our digital preservation system.

Although we have had Preservica for 18 months we have been working hard to get it up and running. As with many other external projects across the wider economy, the need to act fast and push forward with our systems meant that we were able, for the first time, to really test the system and use it in a way which otherwise would probably have taken much longer. Working from home, without the distractions of having to run our Heritage Centre, gave Hannah, our Digital Archivist, and Imogen, our Collections Assistant, the time to really concentrate on putting everything in place to capture the records being created across the business. Their collaboration and hard work with Preservica, to iron out any issues, has resulted in them being able to really progress the digitisation project and this will now reap benefits as we move forward. It gave us the push we needed to run the system putting the theory into practice. A positive move, and although we're not completely there I would suggest we are much further forward than we would have been without COVID-19.

Amongst the records we have been actively collecting are journals from Partners across the business. We selected and wrote to key people who we knew had helped us in the past and asked them to keep a record of how they were feeling, what difference the pandemic made to their working lives and to those with whom they worked. Some continue to keep these going whilst others have sent in their memories which contains some very moving and graphic passages which will be key records of this time in our business. They form a great comparison with the official communications and, given the additional insight provided by the many recorded video meetings, ensure we are able to keep a wide ranging set of records for those who will research this episode in the future. Of course, there remain issues around personal data, however, it does appear that people have been much less concerned with this than they were previously, acknowledging that this has been such a momentous event in our history that it needs to be recorded.

So, all in all, apart from the lack of personal contact, and the need to place some of the team on furlough, I would suggest that COVID-19 has been a time which has maximised our ability to make the archive relevant to the wider business, to enhance our collecting procedures and policies, and above all given us the time and space to ensure we have created an enduring record of this weird time. However, as we begin to venture back and plan the gradual opening of our Heritage Centre, the thought of a vibrant building filled with volunteers and visitors still feels a long way off as we tread carefully back to the future.

Judy Faraday

Partner & Heritage Services Manager, John Lewis Partnership

Save the date and call for papers for the BAC conference - *Do The Right Thing: Inclusivity, Equity and Anti-Racism within Business Archives*

The Business Archives Council is pleased to announce a call for participation for its 2020 conference *Do The Right Thing: Inclusivity, Equity and Anti-Racism within Business Archives* to be held on **17 and 18 November 2020** virtually via Zoom, timings tbc.

Issues surrounding inclusivity and diversity have been given renewed focus in the past year, particularly given global Black Lives Matter protests following the deaths of Black people in the United States by police departments. These protests have, in turn, affected, informed and furthered conversations within the museums, heritage and arts sectors around the role of these organisations' in combating racism, the ongoing impact and legacies of colonisation, as well as the systemic exclusion of different voices within these sectors, from workforce development to collections and their interpretation.

These are vital conversations to be had throughout the archives sector, but particularly pertinent within business archives. Many business archivists are based within organisations which have direct links to enslavement and colonialism and can find themselves at odds with internal colleagues if they are seen to draw external scrutiny to this. At the same time, we know that both archives and archivists are not neutral, and that there is great possibility within our collections and ourselves to effect progressive and sustainable change.

We welcome contributions about, but not limited to the following themes:

- Post-colonial and decolonial approaches to business archives;
- The role of archives within movements for social justice and in supporting alternative curricula;
- Development of guidelines and approaches for equity and inclusion within the archives sector, including protocols regarding cataloguing;
- Reparative histories and institutional accountability through business archives; and
- Alternative entry routes to the recordkeeping profession and workforce diversification.

We hope that this conference will provide a productive space to advance the conversation on structural inequities and racism within the archives and business archives sectors and provide participants with tangible actions and ideas of how to promote inclusivity and anti-racism within their collections and organisations.

Please submit proposals to conference@businessarchivescouncil.org.uk, stating your name, institution (if applicable), type of session proposed and abstract (less than 250 words). Honorariums may be offered in specific circumstances.

The deadline for responses is 1 October 2020 and applicants will be informed w/c 19 October 2020 if they have been successful.

For an informal chat or to discuss a proposal, please contact Meg Venter, conference coordinator, at meg.venter@postalmuseum.org.uk.

A great result for the BAC's sports catalogue grant for 2020!

The BAC is delighted to announce that the winner of the 2020 Grant for Business Archives related to Sports is East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust (EDLCT), to catalogue the archive collection of West of Scotland Football Club.

In this, the second year of the grant, the BAC was pleased to have received a number of applications of a very high standard. It made for a difficult decision, but the panel felt that East Dunbartonshire's cataloguing project would make a real difference, was achievable and realistic, and would lead to further projects and initiatives.

The records of West of Scotland Football Club document the strong links between leisure as a business and the local community. West of Scotland Football Club (despite the name, which is historical) is a rugby club situated in Milngavie, near Glasgow. It is an amateur sports club servicing the Milngavie and Bearsden area, and prides itself in being a vibrant part of that community. Founded in 1865, West of Scotland Football Club is one of the oldest rugby clubs in the world, and one of the founding members of the Scottish Rugby Union. The club has enjoyed a long and successful history, winning numerous Scottish Championships and producing an incredible number of international players, and a strong contingent of British and Irish Lions. The records have recently been gifted to the EDLCT, and once catalogued will be made available to the public.

Full details on the award can be found at:

<https://www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/activitiesobjectives/catgrantsports/>

Winner of 2020 BAC Cataloguing Grant for Business Archives: the Sir Freddie Laker Archive

The judging panel for this years' Cataloguing Grant for Business Archives was impressed with the variety of records of firms represented from across the UK. After individual scoring and joint deliberation, the panel awarded the grant to West Sussex Record Office (WSRO) for the Sir Freddie Laker Archive. The collection documents the rise and fall of Laker Airways and Skytrain, and provides an important insight into twentieth century aviation. The records are also a significant resource for social history, recording a revolution in air travel and tourism, the impact of which is still being felt today.

Founded in 1966, Laker Airways was a small independent aviation firm which owed its success largely to its charismatic owner, Sir Freddie Laker. Laker Airways paved the way for budget airlines such as Ryanair and EasyJet, and challenged the firm grip of larger airlines such as British Airways and Pan Am on long-haul flights. Sir Freddie Laker's innovative Skytrain concept, launched in 1977, did not require advance reservations and provided passengers with a 'walk on, walk off' service at an incredibly low price. It captured the public imagination, proving to be hugely popular.

Laker Airways went bankrupt in 1982 despite enormous public support, both for the airline and for Sir Freddie Laker himself. The company went on to successfully pursue a landmark antitrust suit against British Airways and Pan Am (amongst others), arguing that they had slashed their fares to below-cost levels to drive Laker Airways and Skytrain out of business.



(Courtesy West Sussex Record Office)

The records in the collection date between 1956 and 2004. They comprise a diverse range of material, including Sir Freddie Laker's appointment diaries, Laker Airways' annual reports and accounts, promotional material relating to the launch of Skytrain, and press cuttings that chart in detail the rise and fall of Laker Airways and Skytrain. A particular highlight are hundreds of letters sent to Laker following the collapse of his company in 1982 which document the backgrounds of those who flew with Laker Airways and their many different reasons for travelling. Finally, a series of legal records document the antitrust case brought by Laker Airways against British Airways, Pan Am, TWA and others.

The grant will enable WSRO to fully catalogue the archive with the completed catalogue being made available on WSRO's online catalogue, Search Online, and it will mean that this fascinating archive will be available to researchers for the first time.

Bring your cultural heritage to life with TownsWeb Archiving's *Virtual Tours*!

TownsWeb Archiving has launched *Virtual Tours*, their virtual reality tour service for organisations who want to engage with their audiences online.

Whether you are showing off your museum, gallery, archive exhibition or physical attraction, TownsWeb Archiving will create and deliver a bespoke, top quality 360° virtual tour that is proven to reach and engage with new audiences, and is ideal for the cultural heritage sector.

Virtual reality tours offer the opportunity to make your spaces open and available twenty-four hours-a-day to a worldwide audience. Starting from £990.00, a VR tour will provide the perfect investment opportunity for engaging your audience on a much wider scale.

For further information on TownsWeb Archiving's *Virtual Tour* service click here:

<https://vr.townswwebarchiving.com/>

To request a call back to discuss a *Virtual Tour* for your organisation click here:

<https://app.hubspot.com/meetings/cs20/book-your-vr-call-back>

Manage your digital collections online with TownsWeb Archiving's *PastView Lite* platform – FREE for 12 months!

During 2020, TownsWeb Archiving, developers of *PastView*, are bringing their *PastView Lite* package to support the cultural sector by offering a 12-months, completely free digital collections platform, website, support and training package.

Further information about *PastView Lite* can be found here:

<https://www.townswwebarchiving.com/archive-management-software/pastview/packages/lite/>

To book your initial meeting and get started click here:

<https://www.townswwebarchiving.com/archive-management-software/pastview/packages/lite/#pv-meeting>

Business archive and academic collaboration: resources now available

Members may be aware that our Deputy Chair, Judy Faraday, has been working closely with University of Essex historian, Dr Alix Green, over recent years to encourage the development of collaborative projects between business archivists and academics. You can access the new suite of resources, tailored to the needs of business archives, through a dedicated tab on the BAC website: <https://www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/activitiesobjectives/collaborations/>

[*Facilitating Academic-Archivist Collaborations in Business*](#) is a short and accessible guide hosted on the Managing Business Archives website, featuring issues to consider and some tips for success.

A short film accompanies each section of the guidance, in which business archivists and

researchers offer relevant experiences and advice. Also in the playlist is the bonus *One Piece of Advice* film: a good place to start. Watch the full set [here](#) or find the films alongside other BAC content on our YouTube channel: [We love business archives](#)

Thanks go to Erin Lee (National Theatre) and Tamara Thornhill (Transport for London) for all their efforts as key partners in the project, and to all the other archivists who contributed. We are grateful to the University of Essex for funding the production of the films and Alix Green's time.

***eabh papers*: an opportunity for new scholars!**

The *eabh* working papers series (*eabh papers*), launched in 2014, gives scholars in banking, financial, business, and economic history and related fields the opportunity to distribute their research-in-progress. Making these findings available to a wider audience, even at an early stage, supports authors' searches for qualified feedback, makes their work visible to international audiences, and increases their research impact.

Submission is easy and straightforward!

The editors, Andrea Papadia (Bonn University) and Chenzi Xu (Stanford University), welcome a wide variety of contributions and provide guidance during the application process. For more details please visit: <http://bankinghistory.org/publications/eabh-papers/>.

Proposals can be submitted to: g.massaglia@bankinghistory.org

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