



Business Archives Council Newsletter

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The editor of this newsletter is Benjamin White. The next issue will appear in Winter 2022. Prospective copy should be sent to Benjamin White, email: Benjamin.White@bankofengland.co.uk

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Chair's blog

My last blog mentioned the use of business archives to help in the celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Now, during this period of National Mourning, these records have been put to a more sombre use as we mark the passing of the Monarch.

At the beginning of the month I attended the annual conference of the Archives & Records Association (UK & Ireland) in Chester. It was the first face-to-face ARA Conference since 2019 and, of course, a great deal has happened since then. What a pleasure though to be able to catch up with old friends, who in many cases, I had not met in person for three years. There was plenty to discuss and, as always, some stimulating debate. I also took the opportunity to make the 20 minute train journey to Port Sunlight to visit Claire Tunstall at the Unilever Archive. The collections are, of course, impressive, though I confess a particular love for the original Marmite packaging!



*Lever House, Port Sunlight.
(Courtesy Mike Anson)*



*Display of historic Marmite jars at Lever House,
Port Sunlight.
(Courtesy Mike Anson)*

It's going to be a busy autumn for the BAC. In October we'll be announcing the winners of the BAC Wadsworth Prize, the BAC Research Bursary and the BAC Cataloguing Grant, and we'll be holding our AGM in November. We are also currently planning a BAC Members' Event to be held

at Unilever in London, in October. You'll find further details elsewhere in this Newsletter. By way of background, I should explain that we are not holding our usual conference in November. The reason for this is that we have already helped organise a major event, the conference on surveying in honour of Michael Moss, back in April. We felt that effectively this was our 2022 conference output, but we are also conscious that members might want a learning and networking opportunity, and this is what we are pulling together at the moment. I hope that you will be able to attend.

We have recently recruited some new Trustees. At present they are co-opted, and should be formally appointed at our AGM which is going to be held online on 10 November 2022. Our Treasurer, Brian O'Sullivan, has indicated that he will stand down at the AGM. Brian has greatly enhanced our accounting practices including, for the first time, setting a budget. On behalf of the BAC I would like to thank Brian for his contribution, and wish him well with his future research and writing. We are currently in the process of finding a successor.

So, there's certainly plenty coming up in the next few months, and I do hope that I will be able to actually meet some of you in person!

Mike Anson
BAC Chair

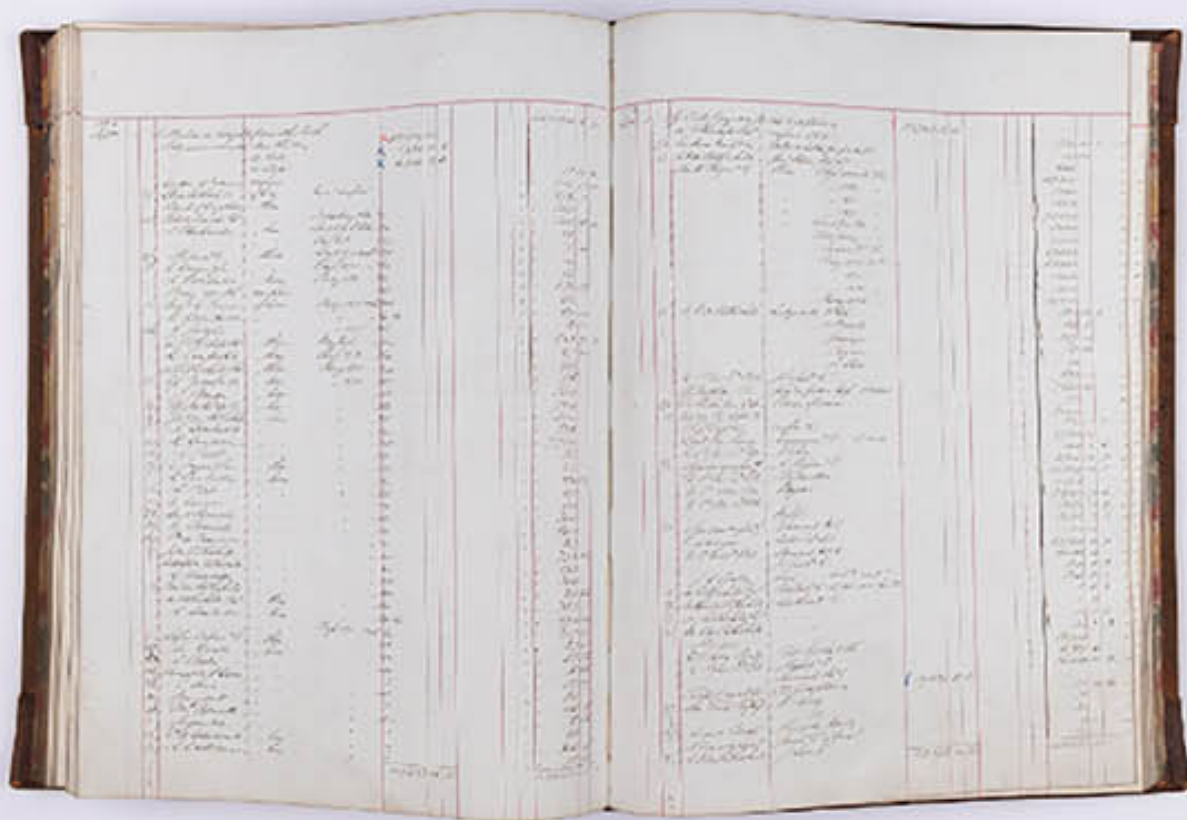
Citizen science initiative in the archives! *The Cash Book Project* at The Rothschild Archive

The Rothschild Archive houses collections and series that span countless ledgers, boxes, or folders, and in some cases, these can contain thousands upon thousands of individual pages of highly structured information and data. For most research questions, an individual item of information is not of core interest, and researchers, instead, accumulate related entries to give significance to each transaction. In many cases, large series can only be consulted in-person and a close reading of the material would take years (a lifetime in some instances!), but research-funding and academic deadlines do not always allow for such a time-consuming endeavour. Access is not only about the physical act of using archival collections.

Furthermore, internal barriers can be baked into the source material, such as the quality of handwriting, in addition to external barriers, such as the researcher's aptitude to read it - a skill that is in decline as the digital world accelerates. Often, collections are underused due to these barriers. *The Cash Book Project* at The Rothschild Archive explores current solutions of computer-aided methods and tools in digital humanities to retrieve information from a collection of handwritten tabular Cash Books and make them accessible through a database.

The Rothschild Archive's Cash Book collection:

The Archive holds a large collection of Cash Books from 1810 – 1950 as part of the Cashiers' department of N M Rothschild & Sons. The Cash Books were described by Charles Rothschild in 1908 as being a 'fair copy of the Balance Book in debit and credit form.' They record the date, the folio reference to the corresponding entry according to the system of double bookkeeping, the account concerned, as well as discounts on transactions and cash received or paid into the Bank or Office.



Cash Book of September 1875 (VIII/13/80)
(Courtesy The Rothschild Archive London)

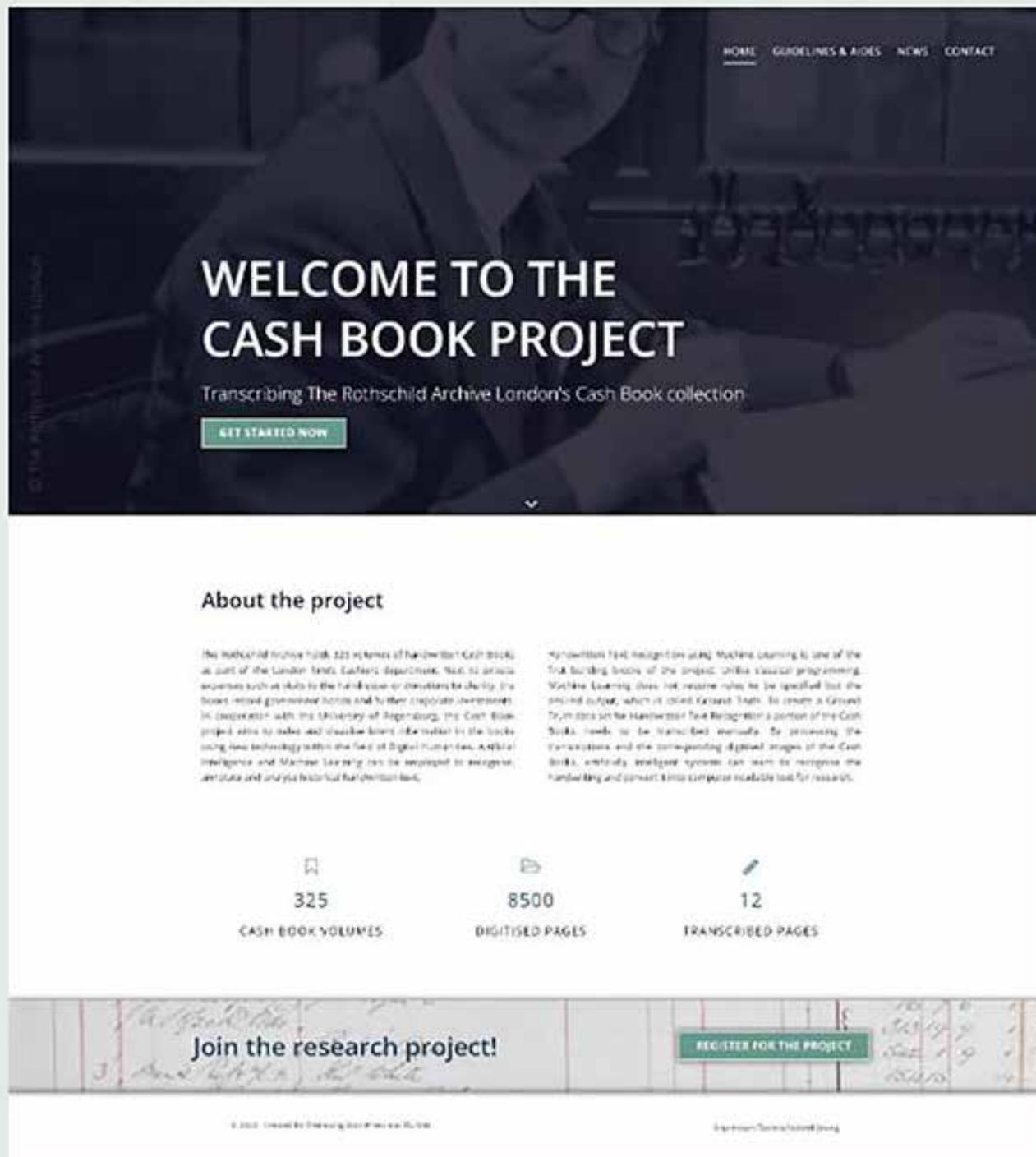
There is both social history as well as financial and economic history contained within the pages ready to be interrogated, since the Cash Books list business and private transactions of the Rothschild family. The price of goods, wages, charitable donations are recorded next to business dealings and state loans. Researchers can also observe and trace the development of bookkeeping as the earliest cash book is dated 1810, and the last runs until 1950. In total, there are 325 books with the largest volumes comprising approximately 550 individual pages.

The Cash Book Project:

The Cash Book Project is a collaboration between The Rothschild Archive London and Regensburg University in Germany. The project aims to index the individual transactions and visualise latent information in the books using new technology in the field of digital humanities. The project focuses on the recognition of the documents to make them searchable, as well as on the possibilities of visualisation of the individual data and the network they span over different entries, with added historical context and information. The goal will be to have the ability to compare and contrast almost instantaneously – searching for and tracking a business, a set of payments, or a specific transaction will no longer require a labour-intensive process but become a simple search function.

A Citizen Science initiative:

Handwritten Text Recognition using Machine Learning is one of the first building blocks of the project. Currently, 30 years of the Cash Books have been digitised and used to create a handwritten text model for the Archive. Since transcribing the pages is very time-consuming, a *Citizen Science* project will support the process as of October 2022. Together with our volunteers, we will explore the Cash Books and the information they hold. More information about the *Citizen Science* project can be found on the project homepage: <https://go.ur.de/cashbooks>



The Cash Book Project homepage
(Courtesy The Rothschild Archive London)

Removing barriers and unlocking potential:

Digitising and indexing our collections with computer-aided methods will not only help to remove barriers and enable greater access but will also unlock new possibilities on how we work with them in various research scenarios. Having a digital edition of the Cash Books will allow the collection to be re-interrogated, pose new research questions and employ further methods in the field of digital humanities to explore the data. Transactions in business records can now be explored beyond their textual level by embedding and visualising them in their historical context through annotations and cross-references. Due to the professionalisation and standardisation of bookkeeping in the 19th century, holdings in other institutions have similar tabular structures and the approach to index the Cash Book can be transferred. The workflow developed for *The Cash Book Project* can consequently help to unlock collections in external projects. Guidelines and workflows will be published to form a template but also so that they can be developed further in the future to explore our collections in new ways.

If you are interested in the project, you can contact us via: info@rothschild.org

Carl Cooper

Assistant Archivist, The Rothschild Archive, London

Bernadette Mischka

PHD Student, University of Regensburg

Uncomfortable Truths: an in-person event for BAC members, 18 October

This year, rather than hosting a conference, we are holding a free, in-person event for BAC members on the theme of uncomfortable truths. The event will be held on Tuesday 18 October from 1pm to 4pm at Unilever's London headquarters.

Speakers will share their experiences of facing challenging pasts and there will be plenty of opportunity for discussion. The event will be followed by networking drinks. Registration details will be emailed to members later this month.

Further dates for your diary!

We've got a packed programme of events coming up for the rest of the year, so we thought we'd let you know what we've got planned so you can get the dates in your diary.

Tuesday 27 September:

Virtual workshop on Surveying delivered in partnership with ARA, TNA and BAC Scotland.

Details and joining instructions available here: [Surveying: A Vital Tool for Rescuing and Responding to Records at Risk — Archives & Records Association](#)

Wednesday 5 October:

Lunch 'n' Learn on Building Relationships. Details and joining instruction can be found via the BAC website, here:

https://businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/news/2022/9/lunch_and_learn_relationships

Wednesday 2 November:

Lunch 'n' Learn on Inclusion and Diversity in Business Archives. This will be just for members and details and joining instructions will be posted on the BAC website nearer the time.

Thursday 10 November:

The BAC AGM will be held online at 11am. Joining instructions will be sent along with the papers in October.

BAC Cataloguing Grant 2021 – Friends of the Huntley Archives at LMA (FHALMA)/The Ananse Society project.

A report was recently submitted to BAC from the Friends of the Huntley Archives at LMA (FHALMA) outlining the progress made so far on The Ananse Society papers which was awarded the BAC cataloguing grant last year.

"Thanks to support from The Business Archives Council and London Metropolitan Archives, we have been able to delve deeper into the uncatalogued archive collections and celebrate one of the many educational initiatives that Eric and Jessica Huntley developed in collaboration with fellow community activists. This is an interim report which we will update with feedback from evaluations and impact stories from the workshop(s) in the autumn. The two accessions (ref: B16/103, [2016] and B18/100 [2018]) make up seven linear metres of material, comprise correspondence, royalties, printed material and videos relating to authors and book launches, and other items dated from 1970s to 2010s. A generous cataloguing grant of £7,000 was made available by BAC in September 2021 to cover costs connected with the project. A further £4,600 has been pledged by FHALMA in kind/pro bono.

The primary outcomes for the BAC Cataloguing Grant project are to support the completion of the process of cataloguing all the business records of Jessica and Eric Huntley, and in this case, chiefly, to develop an educational resource from the business papers of The Ananse Society. It is the discoveries in these uncatalogued records that have formed the basis and inspiration for our outreach project to elevate, reimagine and modernise stories about the famous African folkloric character Ananse and its roots to the Caribbean.

Since FHALMA produced the original project in the spring of 2021, some of the timings of interconnected activities have been altered within the plan's timetable, mainly due to limited access and capacity – the challenges associated with lockdowns and stages of Covid-19 being the reasons for some slight delays, and for making connections with our partner schools. However, the project is broadly on track.

The BAC grant funding has enabled a detailed sort, sifting, in preparation for a more comprehensive box listing of all the material. To date, this has been the organisation and scoping of the accession documents which have been listed in an overall spreadsheet. From the rudimentary listings, we have been able to search through and select a limited number of documents to inform the development of the education outreach and online materials."

As members may remember the 2021 cataloguing grant was increased to £7,000. Funding was provided by BAC and the former Archives and Artefacts Studies Network (A2SN). The additional funding was available to cover project individuals' time to deliver an exciting educational outreach programme relating to the collection. FHALMA has established links with supplementary schools such as Queen Nzinga School and has been working towards designing community education workshops aimed at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) to include a digital archive tour and workshops using The Ananse Society papers.

On Saturday 13 August 2022, FHALMA led the delivery of the first of the public outreach sessions called *Knowing Ourselves, Telling Our Stories*, with the intention of arranging a second workshop in the autumn /winter at LMA. In the report written prior to the event, FHALMA explained the importance of their guest workshop leader, Sandra Agard. Hon FRSL:

“Our workshop will be led by Sandra Agard, a professional storyteller, writer, tutor, book doctor, cultural historian, and literary consultant with over 40 years of experience around the country and abroad. Born in Hackney, London to Guyanese parents; her storytelling, cultural, and literary backgrounds are steeped within African, African-Caribbean oral traditions and blended with the Black British perspective. Her motto is “The Story is in the World”. In July 2022, elected as an Honorary Fellow to the Royal Society of Literature, Sandra's writing has been included in many anthologies such as *Talking Blues* (1976), *Watchers and Seekers* (1988), *Times Like These*, *Time for Telling* (1991), and *Unheard Voices* (2007). Sandra has also written children's plays for the Royal Court Young People's Theatre, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, The Polka Theatre in Wimbledon, and The Drill Hall with the Talawa Theatre Company. She has also been the Literature Development Officer at Southwark and Lewisham libraries for 18 years. In 2016, she was the Centenary Storyteller at the Roald Dahl Museum in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, and she is currently a Learning Facilitator at the British Library. In October 2019, Sandra published her first children's book titled *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*. She has also published two other books titled *The Bristol Bus Boycott: A Fight for Racial Justice* and *Amazing Women in Black History*”.

Active on various social media platforms, you can find more information about FHALMA and The Ananse Society papers via:

- <https://fhalma.org/>
- https://search.lma.gov.uk/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/LMA_OPAC/web_detail?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=refd%20LMA/4462

Natalie Attwood

BAC Grant Administrator

Adrian Allan

We were saddened to learn of the death of Adrian Allen in June following a short illness.

Adrian was a great friend of the Business Archives Council for some 20 years. He joined the BAC Committee in the early 1980s and continued there and in other BAC activities until the early 2000s.

He represented the BAC in the North of England and was in close contact with prominent members such as Nigel Hardman, Len Macdonald and Jeannette Strickland. He was proud of Liverpool University's strong tradition in business history but his outstanding influence on business archives was his editorship of the BAC's conference proceedings, demanding his willing care and attention between 1981 and 1996.

Adrian was a loyal, popular and generous member of the BAC and his support and good humour will be greatly missed.

Edwin Green

Vice President of the BAC