

TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR BUSINESS ARCHIVES

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Acronyms used: BAC: Business Archives Council; BRG: Business Records Group of the Society of Archivists; CBI: Confederation of British Industry; LMA: London Metropolitan Archives; MLA: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; MLACs: the regional agencies for Museums, Libraries and Archives; NCA: National Council on Archives; SoA: Society of Archivists; TNA: The National Archives;

ISSUE 1

Too little awareness of the significance and importance of business archives: within many businesses themselves, (a) at Board level; (b) among staff in archive repositories which have business archive holdings; (c) among archive users, who tend to work well-known seams without exploring more widely

<u>Suggested strategies</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
<p>Specific campaigns of awareness-raising including:</p> <p>targeted at businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple information (along the lines of ‘the ten most frequently asked questions about...’) to be available for study/downloading and adapting to local needs from an agreed website or websites. Sites might include BAC, BRG, TNA, CBI, SoA, NCA • Articles in newsletters might emphasise current corporate governance and/or corporate social responsibility issues and how archives can contribute to these; also the role of archives in spreading wider awareness in the community of the importance of business to British life and the economy 	<p>BRG to draft a prototype ‘ten points’ for consideration. CBI then to be asked to advise what kind of material could best go on its website and/or in its newsletter (TNA to take forward)</p>
<p>targeted at archivists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate training courses to be invited to explain what they currently do to promote/demystify business archives; to equip trainees to work in business archives as opposed to the more ‘traditional’ local authority sector; to catalogue business archives. Overall, to see if more could be done eg by redesigning training courses 	<p>FARMER and SoA to be consulted by TNA</p>
<p>targeted at users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-traditional users of business archives, eg family historians, to be encouraged through article(s) in their journal(s) to use at least deposited business archives 	<p>Terry Gourvish and Jim Bamberg, on behalf of business historians, to give this some initial thought and then liaise with TNA</p>

ISSUE 2

Need to persuade more businesses to care for their archives and records systematically *in situ* and where possible to make them accessible to the public

Constraints

Recognised:

- that the first responsibility of many business archivists is to their company and
- that public access to records held *in situ* may need to be withheld for a range of reasons, which could mean that access is not part of the equation in some circumstances
- that small business archives with few staff are not geared up to the supervision of scholars engaged on long-term research projects

Opportunities

Some archives, eg those of companies subject to statutory regulation, have to be retained by law (although this does not necessarily mean that they have to be available for public inspection)

<u>Suggested strategies</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General publicity as under Issue 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice on how to care for business records <i>in situ</i> to be available through TNA and other websites.	TNA to coordinate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the wake of the Archives Task Force report explore possibility of having 'business champions' in the regions (not necessarily always in archive repositories: eg could be at a regional agency).	TNA and MLA to discuss with MLACs, BAC and other interested partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provision of ready sources of information on best practice in business archives, such matters as how to set up Trusts to hold business archives. To be made available on (or via links from) all the websites as in Issue 1.	TNA , as part of its more general advisory remit, to work with BAC and other partners to coordinate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to sources of public and private funding (eg tax concessions, grant aid) in return or public access or educational outreach.	Treasury response to Goodison review awaited: TNA to monitor. Further discussions with funding bodies (TNA and other partners including MLA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear statements by businesses of the terms on the range of archives available for public access and the nature of any restrictions imposed	TNA to gather and publicise collecting policies and access regulations, in extension of its present role under the Standard for record repositories
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouragement of temporary deposit (eg in a local record office) of business	

archives needed for prolonged research?	
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ISSUE 3

Perhaps 90% of all businesses are small enterprises with no archivist, and archives of many organisations other than businesses (eg charities, societies) may need the same sort of attention

Suggested strategies

Some larger repositories have the capacity to offer storage and management of records on a recharged basis to assist charities and other organisations. This strategy might be commended more widely, especially where there is plenty of space in new archive buildings, and might be built in to local or regional strategy for the care of archives in the future.

ACTION

Mostly up to local repositories according to their capacity.
Explore possibility of eventual regional storage accommodation (**TNA, MLA, MLACs**)

ISSUE 4

Business archives deposited in local and specialist repositories are typically under-used, which makes their retention hard to justify when it comes to comparative unit costs (although it is acknowledged that this is also true of other kinds of records and is not true all of the time or for all business archives)

<u>Suggested strategies</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business historians and archivists, and interest groups such as BAC, to continue to use every opportunity of publicity for business archives through journals, conferences, websites and the additional kinds of outreach proposed under Issue 1 above	BAC et al.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cataloguers of business archives to be made more aware of the need to assist intellectual access to business archives through detailed cataloguing, including whenever possible keyword search facility	More publicity for this need through professional literature eg by BRG
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tackle catalogue backlogs for business archives, especially those deposited in public repositories	Part of the wider issue of cataloguing backlogs. TNA to pursue with funding bodies

ISSUE 5

Inadequate facilities for survey and rescue of business records at risk (Noting particularly the termination of the BAC's Business Records Advisory Service and the lack of resources for many local authority record offices to conduct surveys of any kind of records at risk)

Constraints (which some may also see as issues for further discussion)

Recognised:

- that existing repositories may lack the space or capacity in terms of staff resources to take in bulky records, especially at short notice;
- that TNA has no plans to take in private archives of any kind, including business archives, nor to set up regional or specialised branches for this purpose such as are to be found in some other European countries
- that most archives at the point of rescue will need appraisal and/or weeding to reduce bulk and remove dross;
- that despite the ideal of keeping organically related records together it will sometimes be necessary to split large archives into smaller component parts eg geographical;

<u>Suggested strategies</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
<p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuing role for sectoral surveys and guides to business archives, of the kind undertaken in the past by, for example, BAC and HMC• Continuing role of local authority and some university archive services in undertaking local surveys wherever possible	<p>BAC, TNA et al. TNA, MLA and MLACs to explore scope for some regional activity in this area eg pilot studies to assess business archives in a region All custodians (according to capacity)</p>
<p>Rescue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A fast-response mechanism is needed, through which imminent risk of destruction or loss can be communicated to any body with the power to assist.• Develop guidance on procedures for companies or their archivists/records managers to follow in any emergency	<p>TNA with BRG, BAC and any other interested parties, to discuss how present informal communications could be improved eg by having a single point of contact in an emergency TNA to coordinate</p>