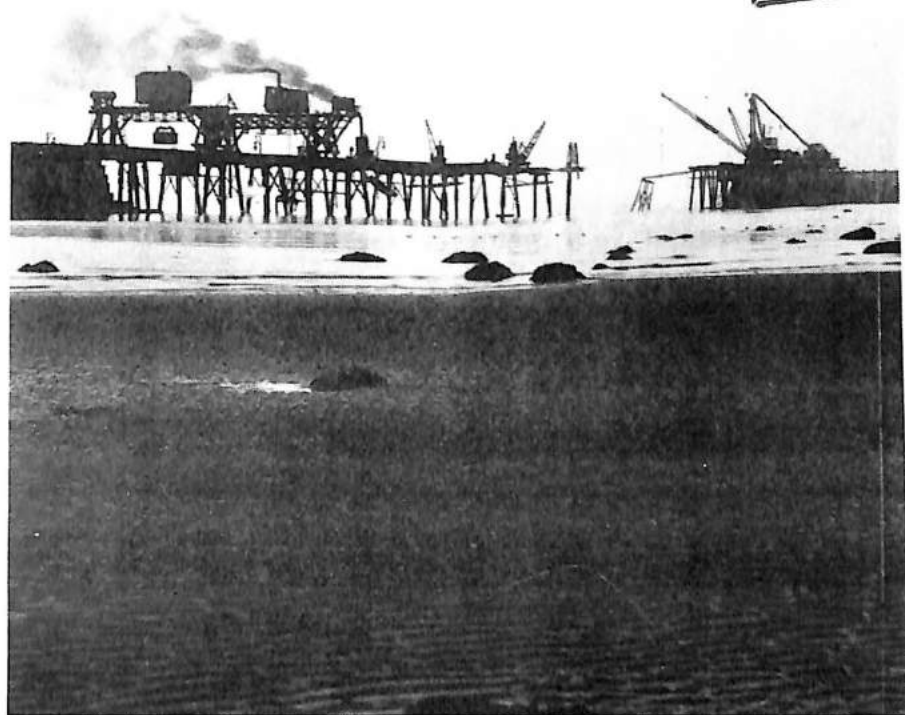
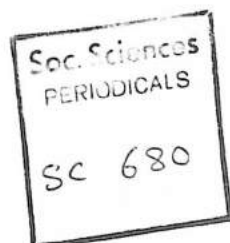


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BUSINESS RECORDS IN SCOTLAND, 1970-1990

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When I was an archivist trainee in the department of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in 1969, I can recall telling George Boyce, who was busy cataloguing the vast and largely uninteresting papers of Lord Bryce, that in the future business records would assume an increasingly important position in archival work. I spoke with great conviction from a position of profound ignorance. In my time as an undergraduate, I had read no histories of business and had only written occasional essays on economic history. I little thought that within a year I would be knocking on the doors of decaying and defunct companies in the West of Scotland in search of these very records.

My arrival in Glasgow was traumatic; the city was at the nadir of its fortunes and the National Register of Archives (Scotland) surveying methods were very different from the patient ordering and calendaring of documents I had encountered at the Bodleian Library. There was determination to save what was important, discard the ephemeral, and list as cost effectively as possible. My brief as Registrar of the Western Survey of the National Register encompassed all historical records, but there was a clear expectation by the management committee chaired by Professor A A M Duncan that I would take over where Peter Payne had left off - a year before. When I arrived I was based in the department of Scottish History, with only tenuous contacts with the University Archives. Peter Payne had gone to Aberdeen and Tony Slaven, although able to come out on emergency rescue expeditions, was heavily engaged in teaching and departmental administration. At the Glasgow City Archives, Richard Dell was hopelessly understaffed. Goodwill, however, prevailed, fostered by Robert Smith, then chairman of the Business Archives Council of Scotland. Armed with lists of possible contacts and sources of records, I set to work with all the impetuosity of youth.

Within weeks I had uncovered significant collections of records, notably the huge archive of the Ardgowan estate at Greenock. It was a cold winter and the Estate Office was as it had been a century before, with high desks, a blazing coal fire, and an ample supply of chocolate biscuits. This lucky break gave me time to make more approaches, using lists of businesses supplied by those with a knowledge of the West of Scotland, particularly John Hume, who was heavily engaged in his industrial archaeology surveys of Glasgow. Almost at our first meeting, we decided to team up, making joint approaches; he would photograph the plant and I would list the records. This was a happy partnership. Together we discovered tons of archives and photographed premises sometimes dating back well into the nineteenth century, which were shortly to disappear. John was also able to teach me a great deal about technical records and their relationship to the purely commercial archives of an enterprise. Out of our close co-operation developed a survey of the Scottish ironfounding industry, once crucial to the West of Scotland's engineering prowess, but now in terminal decline. Although the survey conducted between 1970/71 proved fascinating, it yielded few records - although many of the businesses were over a hundred years old. This lack of written evidence was more than compensated for by John's photographic record of the industry, now the only surviving evidence of the industry, as nearly all the 150 firms we visited have closed. The decline in popularity of industrial archaeology in the last fifteen years has led archivists and museum curators to neglect the importance of making contemporary photographic records for permanent preservation.

Confirmation that, at least in the West of Scotland, large accumulations of papers of historical interest remained in private hands, encouraged the Scottish Record Office to secure funds for two further surveys based at Dundee, in what was to become Tayside, and at Aberdeen, in what was to become the Grampian region. The experience of both these surveys was broadly similar to that in the west. Under Joan Auld, now archivist of Dundee University, the Eastern Survey located and listed large numbers of collections from the traditional industries of Dundee and its surrounding area, many of which, like those in the West of

Scotland, were in imminent danger of collapse. Joan had no long tradition of business record surveying and rescue, as at Glasgow, to build on. She had not only to find the records but also persuade the University Library and the meagre local authority offices in Perth and Dundee to take them. John Hume, with his interest in industrial archaeology and history throughout Scotland, offered help and cheerful encouragement to both Joan and to Aberdeen.

Early in my days as Registrar, I had approached the surviving Clyde shipbuilding firms, but with as little joy as Peter Payne had secured in similar enquiries a decade before. However, one cold October evening in 1971, I was returning to Central Station to be greeted by the news that the Conservative government had placed Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Ltd into liquidation and that Robert Smith had been appointed provisional liquidator. Despite all his many concerns, Robert Smith lent me his support from the beginning. Confident I would find nothing, I visited Fairfields, Connells, and Stephens, to be greeted by huge caches of records. I remember going with John Hume to Fairfields where, like excited schoolboys, we found the drawings of the first compound and triple expansion engines, a remarkable collection of hull drawings and, under the foundations of the building, the firm's records back to its foundation. Their removal has become a legend. There was space only to crawl and a team comprising Richard Dell, Tony Slaven, Archie Duncan, John Hume, David Reid of Robertland, and myself, had to form a human chain to pass them through a manhole to the waiting van. At Connells, Tony Slaven and I discovered the best set of wage records of any Clyde shipbuilding or engineering firm stored in what can best be described as a boilerhouse. Together we removed them to the Glasgow City Archives where we encountered Olive Checkland, who, not batting an eyelid at our filthy condition, asked if we knew the whereabouts of a certain collection.

The Clydebank yard of John Browns proved to be a classic example of why an archivist should never give up. Repeated approaches, urged on by John Bates at the Scottish Record Office, drew a blank, until a chance conversation with the resident director's secretary revealed the existence of a large safe in the main office. I arranged a visit and found a vast room that

contained, in no particular order, the records of UCS, John Brown and J & G Thomson, apparently intact, along with wartime utility underwear and socks (I can testify that they never wear out!) and large quantities of pickled herrings ordered for the long forgotten launch of a Danish ship. There then began a period of intense work, with John Hume, Tony Slaven and John Bates, giving up as much time as they could to list the collection. It was bitterly cold and we all succumbed to chills. As the work progressed and we gained the confidence of the staff, so the real extent of the collection became apparent. Further groups of records turned up, including the all important comparison of cost and estimates books stored in the attic of the yard manager's office. Eventually, when the task was completed, the whole collection was removed to the Business Records Store at the University. The back axle of the University lorry broke on the first run, but luckily the Commander of the University Naval Squadron had arranged the loan of a huge naval lorry. During 1972, after protracted negotiations and the intervention of Edward Heath, the collection was acquired for the nation through a joint package of funding put together between the Treasury and the local authorities.

The experience of dealing with the enormous UCS collection impressed upon the Scottish Record Office the need to devise a strategy for handling large accumulations of technical records, which from now on were to be regarded as integral to a collection rather than being stored separately in a museum or specialist archive. With John Bates' encouragement, John Hume and I wrote a memorandum on the subject which resulted in the creation of a post of technical records officer at the Scottish Record Office. The first incumbent, Jack Sime, had immediately to work out retention schedules for historic and non-current drawings with the help of depositories and Bill Lind, an enthusiastic collector of ship models and a knowledgeable historian of the Clyde industry. Reinforced by Jack Sime's appointment, combined approaches were made to other engineering firms who were thought to have large accumulations of technical drawings, notably Andrew Barclay Sons & Co of Kilmarnock, which had acquired the goodwill of the North British Locomotive Company. The Barclay collection, now deposited in the Business Records collection at the University

of Glasgow, comprises drawings not only of all the steam locomotives constructed by Barclays, but the majority of those manufactured by NBL and diesel railcars built by Armstrong Whitworth, along with a mass of drawings of a bewildering variety of mechanical engineering products. Other collections with significant caches of technical drawings were those from A & W Smith, the Glasgow sugar machine manufacturers, and Fullerton Hodgart & Barclay, general engineers, of Paisley, who specialised in very deep winding gear.

I remained as Registrar of the Western Survey until October 1974, when I was appointed Archivist of the University of Glasgow. By then I had carried out more than 300 surveys and arranged for the deposit of tons and tons of records in the Glasgow City Archives and in the Business Records Store at the University. Shortly after my appointment, day-to-day management of the collection was transferred from the Department of Economic History to the University Archives. The work of surveying did not lapse. Janet McBain took over from me as Registrar and continued where I had left off. The Western Survey continued until 1977 when the whole programme of regional surveys, sponsored by the National Register of Archives (Scotland) came to an end following the development of regional and district record offices in Strathclyde, Tayside and Grampian. The Scottish Record Office, however, was convinced that there was a need to make provision for the surveying of records, particularly those of businesses broadly conceived, throughout Scotland. Although the National Register of Archives included a surveying officer on its establishment, the occupant of this post was wholly pre-occupied in listing family papers still in private hands, and the SRO's technical archivist had more than enough to do in weeding and cataloguing the rapidly growing accumulation of marine and engineering records. Likewise, the new local authority record offices and the University Archives at Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and St Andrews, lacked the resources to conduct anything more than the most urgent rescue operations. John Bates suggested that the Business Archives Council of Scotland should be the vehicle for future surveying activity, using as a model the London-based British Record Association, which received a grant-in-aid for

this purpose from the Historical Manuscript Commission. Bill Lind, who had recently taken over as secretary of the Council, was enthusiastic and the Council, through its new chairman, Norman Biggart, appealed to the Scottish clearing banks for support. When this was forthcoming, the Scottish Record Office secured a matching grant from the Treasury.

The first surveying officer was David Cross, who quickly demonstrated that the expectation that much remained to be done was entirely correct. He and his successor, Lesley Millar (now Richmond), both left to join the Business Archives Council in London, using the expertise they had gained in Scotland to conduct similar surveys south of the border. The establishment of the BAC(S) surveying post coincided with the formation of the Manpower Services Commission. Both Dundee and Glasgow University Archives secured funds from the MSC to underpin the work of rescuing and listing business collections and in so doing providing informal archival training to a number of people who later secured full-time posts in archives in Scotland. Since 1977 there have been several surveying officers of the BAC(S), each completing a regular thirty to forty surveys every year, the scope of the surveys reflecting their individual interests. Since the majority of enterprises in Scotland are situated in the central belt, by far the greatest number of surveys have been undertaken in the Glasgow and Edinburgh areas, with the listings of large collections, like those from J & P Coats of Paisley (now Coats Vyella) and Ivory & Sime, the Edinburgh-based investment trust managers. The far north, the Borders and the Islands have not been overlooked, with surveys of the records of malt distilleries and the Borders textile industry. As long as there is no complete coverage of well-staffed local authority record offices in Scotland, there will be a need for such provision. Recognizing that the annual renewal of the grant-in-aid was an unnecessary formality when the surveying officers so consistently turned up new material, the Scottish Record Office, in 1979, arranged for the cycle to be extended to three years. In addition, the size of the grant was doubled in 1989 to allow for a contribution to be made towards the salary costs of the manager of the Business Record Centre at Glasgow University, where many of the collections rescued by the surveying officer are

stored. These decisions coincided with another welcome development crowning the achievements of the past twenty years - the formation of the Aggregate Foundation and Ballast Trust based in the department of Economic History at Glasgow University.

The Ballast Trust, established by an anonymous benefactor at the same time as the Aggregate Foundation (which is described elsewhere in this journal), is designed specifically to promote the preservation of business archives throughout Scotland. As part of this policy the Trust has agreed to make an annual donation to the Business Archives Council of Scotland. In addition, small grants will be made to archive repositories to assist with the conservation and listing of major collections. Already the Dundee Archives has received a grant, matched by the local authority, to list the records of the Dundee Harbour Trust and make them available to the public. The Trust is not simply a passive body simply dispersing income to deserving causes through the secretary of the Business Archives Council of Scotland, Bill Lind; it seeks to promote the understanding and use of technical records. Already under Bill Lind's direction, the Trust is engaged in the huge task of listing the records of the Scott Lithgow group of companies at Port Glasgow, which are predominantly technical. The Trust now has a backlog of collections of technical records awaiting listing, including those of Hasties, the Greenock steering gear manufacturers rescued by the Business Archives Council of Scotland. Apart from listing technical records directly, the Trust will provide training on this specialised topic, open to archivists and museum staff from the whole of Britain.

For some time before the Aggregate Foundation and Ballast Trust were established, we at Glasgow, had been faced with an acute accommodation crisis. The original store in the Adam Smith Building, the brainchild of Roy Campbell, was bursting at the seams and an outstation at Cochno House in the country above Clydebank was inadequate. The formation of the Trust and Foundation and the creation of the Centre for Business History in Scotland coincided with the provision of funds by the University Grants Commission for the rationalisation and improvement of facilities in the History departments and the Social Sciences

building at Glasgow. As part of a package of funding, two floors of an old flour mill in Thurso Street were refurbished to high standards to create a new Business Records Centre. During the summer of 1989, the collection, which by then extended to 15,000 linear feet, was removed to the new Centre which opened to readers towards the end of October. The construction of this new store could not have happened at a more opportune time as, while work was in progress, Babcock & Wilcox, following their merger with FKI, decided to deposit the whole of their important archive (some 800 linear feet), and Barr & Stroud, the optical engineers at Anniesland, persuaded the Pilkington Group Archive to allow them to transfer their records to the University. The Glasgow University Business Record Centre is one of the best equipped archives in Scotland, but there is little room for expansion.

Despite all the many achievements of the last twenty years in securing the written heritage of Scotland's industry and commerce, there can be no room for complacency. The most urgent problem remains accommodation. In the present straitened circumstances of their finances, there can be little expectation of further accommodation from either universities or local authorities. What is desperately needed is a low-cost dump, possibly financed jointly by the Scottish Record Office, local authorities and universities. Expectations that the private sector itself could fund the preservation of records directly is unrealistic since most of the collections at risk in Scotland come from businesses that have either ceased trading or have scant resources. More seriously, in the long term, is the insidious pressures within organizations to audit the use of collections. Inevitably, in such an exercise, business records will be poor losers to parochial and local authority records, partly because many archivists have little knowledge of how they can be used by historians other than those of business itself. As a result, in some parts of Britain, but not yet in Scotland as far as I know, there are suggestions that business collections should be refused by local record offices. In preventing such an attack on a resource created with so much effort and money, the new Centre for Business History in Scotland should play a vital role. When collections are well used, like the shipbuilding and locomotive manufacturing records at Glasgow,

there are equally insidious proposals about charging. While I have no objection to readers paying for services - and this has long been our policy at Glasgow - the income generated can never meet the whole cost of maintaining an archive.

We undoubtedly now have the best provision for the preservation of business archives in Scotland anywhere in the United Kingdom, but we have probably reached the stage where there needs to be some overall policy to resist these pressures which, in the long run (when we are all dead), could undermine all our efforts. The Business Archives Council of Scotland can provide a forum for discussion, but the Scottish Record Office, which stimulated much of this work, should, through its Advisory Council, establish the policy before it is too late.