I The Beginnings

Most accounts of the origins of the Business Archives Council begin with the publication of a letter in The Times on 21 June 1934 announcing the formation of the new body, then called the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives, as though this indisputably set the seal upon the event and provided at the same time incontrovertible evidence for the historian.²

That letter had a star-studded cast of signatories. They appeared in alphabetical order but with precedence, both alphabetical and hierarchical, given to Stanley Baldwin, Lord President of the Council, past and future Prime Minister. The other non-academic names on the list were Lord Davis; F C Goodenough of Barclay’s Bank; Lord Hanworth, Master of the Rolls; Edward Hoare of Hoare’s Bank (Hon. Treasurer of the fledgling Council), Sir Herbert Lawrence, head of Glyn Mills, and Sir Josiah Stamp, Chairman of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway. The academics on the list were led by Sir William Beveridge, Director of the London School of Economics; J H Clapham, Professor of economic history at Cambridge; G N Clark,³ Chichele Professor of economic history at Oxford; A F Pollard, Director of the Institute of Historical Research in London, and Arthur Redford, Reader in Economic History at Victoria University, Manchester.

The Times letter was followed on 24 June by a full-column report of the new Council in The Observer, inspired by an interview offered by Sir William Beveridge, under the headlines, ‘Business Archives. Sir William Beveridge on Preservation. Romance in Records’.

The aims of the new body, as publicly declared in the letter to The Times, were manifold, and should be compared with the present commitments of the Business Archives Council in the very different context of the 1980s. First came a declaration of the importance of business records for the study of economic history and the growing perils of their destruction. The Council was to organise information on the records which existed. In particular, its ‘first object’ was to ‘map out the ground’ by compiling a register of all business archives over 100 years old by means of questionnaires. Owners ‘who are
unwilling to begin the labour of exploring and classifying their own papers’ would be offered help in the task, with advice on schedules of preservation and destruction (the latter as an essential means to prevent indiscriminate and total destruction). The Council would arrange for the deposit of papers in ‘public libraries and institutions’, paying regard to ‘such reasonable conditions as their owners shall impose’.

Great sensitivity was shown about prospective relations with the business community. Success was acknowledged to depend ‘peculiarly upon the friendly cooperation of a great number of business firms and private families’ whose apprehensions about unwelcoming disclosures were to be allayed. As a succinct but bland sentence put it: ‘the Council only desire to make [information about the records] available to serious historians who, while naturally anxious for the utmost latitude which can conveniently be allowed, will loyally abide by any restrictions which may be laid upon publication.’ The letter expressed the hope and intention that the Council, although independently launched, would ultimately form a section of the British Records Association (formed just two years previously) ‘which now coordinates all work of this kind.’

So much for the statement which announced the formation of the Council to a wider public in 1934. But what lay behind the event? What was its prehistory? Who were the main proponents of the venture? In what circumstances did this happen?

Certainly business history was already an expanding field of research and publication, raising the central issue of the existence and accessibility of those categories of records upon which its historians principally depended. Throughout the 1920s Manchester University Press had published a series of splendid monographs from the pens of its local economic historians, amongst them G W Daniels, *The Early English Cotton Industry* (1920); George Unwin and others, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights* (1924); T S Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution* (1924); T S Ashton and J Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century* (1929); A P Wadsworth and J de C Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire* (1931). Other basic monographs came from other publishers, such as Herbert Heaton *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries from the Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford U P, 1920) and Henry Hamilton *The English Copper and Brass Industries to 1500* (Longmans, 1926).

Much was made of business records in such studies, which set the professional
bed-rock for the subject in Britain. In the preface of George Unwin’s *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights* (M U P, 1924, pp.v–vi) came the famous paragraph which set out the problem of neglect. ‘The distribution of some eighteenth-century weavers’ pay-tickets by an adventurous boy scout to casual passers by led Mr Arthur Hulme to obtain permission to explore the upper floor of this building [Arkwright’s dilapidated old cotton mill at Mellor] and here on January 1st, 1921, when I joined the search at his invitation, we found a great number of letters, papers, account books, and other business records of every kind and size, covering the whole floor of a large room and partly hidden from sight by several inches of dust and debris. To all appearance the records had lain there for a century, and as the room since the fire had lost its windows they had suffered much from the weather and were in many cases indecipherable.’

In the United States the Business History Society had been formed in 1926 at the Baker Library, seat of the Graduate School of Business Administration in Harvard. G N Clark had devoted to business history a central part of his inaugural lecture at Oxford (it was inaugural for the Chichele chair of economic history in the university as well as for his first tenure of it) delivered on 21 January 1932 — not irrelevantly when we consider the juxtaposition of dates.4

The British Records Association had been formed only in 1932 to champion the cause and organise the arrangements for saving historical records generally in the country, with the Master of the Rolls, Lord Hanworth, leading a campaign to save manorial records in particular. This was a world without a National Register of Archives, where County Record Offices were far from universal in the provinces and where they existed did not usually acknowledge any responsibility for bulky, unfashionably modern and professionally alien business records.

In such a context the spot-light focuses upon the London School of Economics in the summer of 1932. On 18 June the Director, Sir William Beveridge, received a memorandum from Eileen Power, Professor of economic history at the School, suggesting the formation of a Committee for the Study and Preservation of London Business Archives.5 This was a well argued document of some substance. The aim was to compile a register of archives of London businesses only, and also to establish a depository. The parallel of the efforts of the Master of the Rolls in relation to manorial records was instanced, as it had been by G N Clark in his inaugural lecture. A part-time
secretary with a salary would be needed and a schedule of preliminary work was listed, which included an appeal for information to the press and consultations with institutions which were already doing comparable work mentioning the Harvard Business School and the Economics Department of the University of Manchester. L S E was to inaugurate the scheme and L S E library was envisaged as the depository.

Miss Power called on the Director to summon a meeting, which should include the Deputy Keeper of the P R O; the Professors and Readers in economic history in the University of London, lecturers in economic history at L S E, a representative of the Business Administration Department at L S E and the Reader in the History and Records of London. Next down the list came 'interested governors of L S E' who would be willing to give their help 'which would be extremely useful in getting into touch with business firms'; the librarian of the British Library of Political and Economic Science at L S E, the Professors of economic history at Oxford and Cambridge and Mr Richard Pares of All Souls College, Oxford 'who had done a good deal of work on the subject' and, finally in the list, representatives of business firms and city companies. She hoped that those coming to the proposed meeting would appoint a committee 'or be the committee.'

Beveridge circulated the memorandum to the 'emergency committee' of L S E, a policy-making group at the School, with a note that 'there would be no difficulty in meeting any expenses from the Rockefeller Research Grant [currently enjoyed by L S E] should the preliminary enquiries justify the inception of the scheme'. He asked Eileen Power to get one of the assistants in the department to compile a list of old established firms.

By 15 July, almost two years before the formal inception of the Council, the Emergency Committee had acknowledged its great interest and had agreed that 'if possible, such a scheme should be carried out by the School.' It is, perhaps, not fanciful to see the hand of Michael Postan, a younger and more junior colleague of Eileen Power, in this original memorandum. His interests in modern economic history were more directly engaged than Eileen Power's. It was doubtless important for such a scheme to be put to the Director by a professor rather than by junior lecturers. For reasons not yet known, a gap then ensued for six months, until January 1933, when Beveridge set about writing to certain governors of the School, in particular to Sir Josiah Stamp, Chairman of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (his letter-head simply stating 'Euston Station') Hugh Lewis of the Liverpool and London
and the Globe Insurance Companies; to General Dawnay of Dawnay Day in the City and to Sir Henry Strakrosch of the Union Corporation. Michael Postan was evidently asked to summon the academics.

In the event 12 persons assembled at 5 p.m. on 14 February 1933. Apart from those already mentioned, they also included Professor Arnold Plant, Mr A G Stamp, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, Mr Headicar and Mr Menken of the Business Administration Department and Mr A V Judges of LSE, who was destined to play the principal executive role of the future Council as its most active Secretary. Hugh Lewis and G N Clark sent apologies. No one from Manchester attended and T S Ashton, unlike Arthur Redford, is not mentioned at all in these early years of the Council.

The meeting endorsed the proposals but with the limitations of the terms of reference to London business archives now being dropped. Preparations were to be set on foot, with Richard Pares and A V Judges jointly responsible. The Director agreed to 'seek out' the Master of the Rolls. As A V Judges wrote to Beveridge on the following day: 'the main thing at this stage is, I suppose, to get him to agree to use his name. If, in addition, he will take an active part in promoting the new activity, nothing could be better'. Letters to the Press had to be prepared and a list of influential persons drawn up. All questions of finance were postponed. Eileen Power had prepared detailed notes for Beveridge, who was taking the chair at this meeting, suggesting the name adopted 'The Council for the Preservation of Business Archives' and noting that *The Times* had carried a sympathetic letter about business archives in June 1931, on the occasion of the Anglo-American Historical Conference. She included a draft letter to the Press. LSE was agreed on as a 'serviceable address'. The meeting agreed to establish a connection with the British Records Association, just formed. A *Memorandum on Business Records* had already been drawn up.

By 13 March Beveridge had seen Lord Hanworth, Master of the Rolls, and enlisted his support. On 13 June 1933 A V Judges reported to Beveridge that 'we have everything ready for launching the new body including a list of signatures, a draft letter to *The Times* and a scheme of development. The Rockefeller Research Fund Committee of the School had provided £25 to cover the initial costs, followed by a further £60 in December 1933 for 'carrying out of the initial work necessary to the compilation of a register of business archives'.

Only negotiations with the British Records Association seem to have been
holding up the launch, and a prospective agreement between the two bodies was not ready until January 1934. Evidently the Council of the B R A had not agreed at its Annual General Meeting in July 1933 on the propositions put to Hilary Jenkinson, their Secretary, by A V Judges in June 1933. The essence of the hesitation doubtless lay in the fact that the B R A did not welcome a proliferation of independent bodies in the archives business and wanted business archives to become a section of the Association and hence subject to the authority of its Council. The promoters of the C P B A felt that raising money and cooperating with business firms — to mention only two of its activities — would be more effectively conducted by an independent body.

Even though the subsequent absorption of the C P B A into the B R A did not occur, this take-over had been clearly anticipated from the start and then announced in the letter to The Times of 21 June 1934. The agreement, in principle, was that when launched as an independent body, the identical officers and committee of the new council would be reconstituted as a business archive section of the B R A, existing in parallel in both manifestations until a point when the C P B A would be disbanded. Until then the B R A would have ‘nominal control’ while the C P B A preserved ‘practical autonomy’. ‘It is further proposed, ‘wrote Judges to Jenkinson on 24 June 1933, ‘that the Section [i.e. the proposed business archives section of the B R A] will maintain the C P B A in being for so long as it is felt to be necessary to have an alternative facade behind which to operate e.g. for appeals for money in certain quarters.’

By the beginning of the New Year Judges could write once more to the Director that everything was now ready for another meeting ‘which might found the C P B A’. He proposed (in advance of the launch) the Master of the Rolls, Lord Hanworth, as President and General Dawnay as Chairman, with G N Clark as Vice-Chairman. H A Shannon, then an assistant in the department at L S E, had agreed to become another joint Secretary with particular responsibility for building up the proposed register and so acted until his departure for an overseas post in 1935. In the event General Dawnay was not anxious to become Chairman; hence the preferment of G N Clark.

For this enlarged public meeting of 11 May 1934, summoned specifically to inaugurate the Council, 55 printed invitations were despatched to those eminent in the library and records world, the world of business and that of modern economic and business history. The invitation stated that: ‘All recipients of this invitation, most of whom have already expressed a wish to
take part in the work of the new organisation, are invited also to accept nomination as original Members of the Council'. The list is too long to be reported in full detail here but its main features deserve discussion.

From the library world came the librarian of the City of Birmingham, H M Cashmore, who became an initial member of the executive committee, and the heads of the National Library of Scotland, the John Rylands Library, the Library of L S E and that of the University of Glasgow, the Keeper of MSS of the British Museum, the Curator of Historical Records of H M General Register, Edinburgh. The roll-call of the academics includes many familiar names, apart from those in L S E and Oxford who have already featured in the story: A H Dodd, Professor in the University College of North Wales; G C Allen, Professor of Economic Science in Liverpool; C R Fay, Reader in Cambridge; Henry Hamilton, Lecturer in economic history at Aberdeen; W K Hancock, Professor in Birmingham; W R Scott, Professor of Political Economy in Glasgow; J F Rees, Principal of the University College of S Wales; N F Hall, Head of the Economics Department at University College, London; Conrad Gill, Professor of History at Hull; Arthur Redford, Reader in Economic History at the Victoria University, Manchester. The representatives of the business world whose attendance was sought were now much more widely based; new names on the list included industrialists: Lord Dulverton, Chairman of Imperial Tobacco; Cecil Lubbock of Whitbreads; Sir E J Reid of Hadfields; Sir Stephen Bilsland of Glasgow — he was President of the Chamber of Commerce as well as of the large baking business — and Josiah Wedgwood. From commerce came Sir Algernon Aspinall, Secretary of the West Indies Committee; Philip Runciman of the Baltic, Mercantile and Shipping Exchanges; A Leigh, Secretary of the London Chamber of Commerce. Edward Hoare arrived as Hon. Treasurer of the British Records Association (also becoming Hon. Treasurer of the new Council) with fellow bankers Francis Rodd of Morgan Grenfell; Sir Herbert Lawrence of Glyn Mills and Sir E J Reid of Barings. Eileen Power had persuaded her cousin Arnold Power, executive head of W H Smith, to participate. Arthur J Tweed, Chairman of Messrs R Twining Ltd was also invited. This list of invitations produced a presence of 19 at the meeting but those attending are not individually noted. In the event there were 39 persons designated as ‘original Members’ of the Council — 19 academics, 11 librarians and those eminent in records associations, including the President in this category, 7 eminent businessmen, and two others.

Apart from the issues already discussed the meeting had the draft of the letter
to *The Times* on the table (which the published letter followed very closely) with the text of a memorandum *History from Business Records*, subsequently the first published pamphlet of the Council later in 1934, a recognisable offspring of a section of Eileen Power’s original memorandum of 1932. Because of the earlier decision to make the terms of reference of the new Council national, rather than London, communications were to be opened with many centres: ‘the history and economics department in universities and university colleges in England and Wales and Scotland’, with the officers of the P R O and the General Register House in Edinburgh and the Institute of Historical Research, and the Council prepared to establish local organisations and branches subject to appropriate coordination and ultimate authority at the centre. Clearly, while the Council with a London based office might itself organise, preferably with paid help, the register of London-based firms with archives over 100 years old (the date 1830 ‘was not to be interpreted very strictly’) archives in other parts of the country would have to be surveyed from regional offices and the listings sent to London, as well as being maintained as regional registers. Came 21 June and *The Times* reading public knew what had happened.12

With the new evidence about the pre-history of the Council, culled mainly from the archives of L S E through the papers of A V Judges, we can see with hindsight that the initiative for its formation came centrally from economic historians and that L S E was the originating centre, with the economic historians there successfully mobilising their Director, supplementary initiatives coming principally from Oxford.13 L S E remained the ‘working home’ of the Council until the Second World War with A V Judges as its principal Secretary. There the card indexes of the register accumulated until the dispersal to Oxford on the threat of bombing. The Institute of Historical Research remained only an accommodation address. The Oxford connection — in fact the All Souls’ connection — prospered with G N Clark as Chairman and Richard Pares initially as joint-Secretary. It was consolidated in 1937 when Sir Wilfred Greene, another Fellow of All Souls, succeeded Lord Hanworth as Master of the Rolls and was persuaded at the entreaty of G N Clark and Richard Pares to succeed him also as President of the C P B A. All Souls was also prominent at this time in the vestigial finances of the Council. Membership evidently remained by invitation in those early years and subscriptions were confined to a handful of corporate members. The number of members remained under 60 until 1955–6 and the annual income under £200, contributed by a handful of the main banks led by the Bank of England, Lloyds, Midland and Barclays at £10 each; with All Souls also a
regular contributor of £10 p.a. and King's College Cambridge (doubtless dunned by Clapham) of £5 p.a.¹⁴

Before the outbreak of war led to the migration of the Council and its register what had been achieved? Great publicity, a new forum for activity, a new focus for endeavour. Many economic historians had been mobilised to assist, if only because a national register required local volunteers, and all the questionnaires sent to firms offered help from 'a trained economic historian', with the council offering to pay travelling expenses. A paid employee was sought only for the London work, because of its extent. By 1935 a local register for the Midlands was being organised through the Birmingham Central Reference Library, a local committee was operating under the Lord Provost of Aberdeen as the nucleus of a national centre for Scotland, the National Library of Wales was coordinating its own scheme with the Council; a scheme was 'on paper' for other regional centres and the central register in London 'was growing'. By 1937 the survey of 'old London business houses' to which the Council had given priority was 'about two-thirds finished'. 'Propaganda' (another of the stated general aims of the Council) by contrast was reportedly being held back by lack of funds.

In truth the Council was running on a shoe-string in terms of both finance and of administrative staff. A V Judges held the whole together, almost alone, on a day-to-day basis, it seems, indefatigably penning lapidary (and legible) letters in long-hand to all and sundry, from the Council's office which was his own room in L S E. The first impetus had made many bridgeheads of activities but none, except the accumulating register, had been consolidated or exploited. The Council continued independently of the B R A but with cross-representation on its committees and a common president in the Master of the Rolls.

War threatened the effective continuity, if not the continued formal existence, of the Council while so greatly adding to the necessity of its work. G N Clark remembered negotiating for the card indexes of the register to be deposited at Nuffield College, Oxford, then in gestation, with Lord Lindsay in the Master's Lodgings at Balliol, with the Master disparaging 'these societies for preserving the junk of the past.'

II The Middle Phase

Virtually no activity took place during the war, with all interested parties actively engaged on more urgent pursuits, and no annual reports appeared
between 1939 and 1946. The executive committee met only twice in these years.

The post-war context for the C P B A was very different but it returned to its old moorings initially and had not changed its functions markedly in the changed habitat; now with a well organised, publicly funded National Register of Archives and a completed system of county record offices, many of whose archivists were showing greater interest in business records. The general register whose card indexes I remember in dusty, rather neglected boxes in the early 1950s was getting outdated and rather redundant (although I found an eighteenth-century hop merchant’s journal through its listing on the register, and many other historians must have comparable experiences). The need for a forum, for a joint organisation linking the business community and economic historians for this common interest, and potentially joint endeavour, was even stronger.

Economic history was becoming a rapidly expanding subject, not least in industrial and business history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for which business records formed a principal primary source. The extraordinary bibliography of the Industrial Revolution was rising to full flood. Company histories, led by some notable pre-war work in the history of banks, developed a new academic and professional status enhancing the links between economic historians and the business community (economic historians like to think that it is particularly the progressive firms who sponsor serious economic histories). The business world was itself changing in ways which were to affect critically relations with an organisation standing at the interface with academic historians. As the scale of business organisations grew and larger groupings emerged so professional archivists took up positions in larger firms, sometimes associated with a decision to sponsor a serious detailed history of the business; again led by the main banks, and the banks led by the Bank of England, they began to form a specific new professional constituency within the Business Archives Council, as it had been renamed in 1952. This business membership supplemented the older tradition, still happily preserved, of the head of the family firm identifying with the B A C from a personal interest in the history of family and firm.

At first nothing much had changed. When T S Ashton (who had not been directly associated, it seems, with the Council when in the Economics Department at Manchester before his appointment to the chair of economic history at L S E) became Chairman in 1946, succeeding G N Clark, he was anxious
that the Council should sponsor publications and in 1950 he gave details of possible ventures which included Lional Cranfield, the Autobiography of William Stout, and the Diary of Samuel Walker. F J Fisher, a member of the committee since 1937, urged that at least four such projects be put in train at once. The library grew gradually, mainly by gift, in a haphazard way and was as remarkable for what business histories were not represented in it as for those which were. Members of the Council were active in the various negotiations concerning the disposal of the archives of firms coming together in the nationalised industries. Much advice was given on an individual basis and many records saved as a consequence; very little of such activities feature in the annual reports of these years, which remained skeletal documents. The fact remained, however, that one of the central original aims of the Council, the compilation of a general national register of business archives, had largely lapsed and no main alternative commitment had been accepted which might replace the momentum provided by this role. Meanwhile the office became peripatetic, with its annual report issued from six different addresses in the two decades after 1946.

In terms of membership and income the Council remained quiescent, with new members joining only by invitation until 1955. Then came the change. From a membership of 51 and subscriptions of £200 in 1956 steady expansion took place: 172 members and an income of £1,128 in 1960; 264 members bringing in £2,200 in 1965; 320 members (247 firms and institutions; 73 individual members) and an income of £3,150 in 1972; continuing to reach 457 (of which 318 were firms and institutions and 139 individuals) in 1983, with a total subscription income of £9,743.16

The expansion in membership and income dating from 1955 had one specific source of momentum. It was not a change in the secretaryship — Miss Irene Shrigley held this office all the way through between 1946 and 1960. Nor was it a change of treasurer: John Wadsworth of the ‘intelligence department’ of the Midland Bank took over from Edward Hoare in 1950. Undoubtedly, the advent of Stephen Twining (father of the B A C’s current Chairman, Sam Twining) as Chairman, taking over from T S Ashton in 1955/6, is the explanation. He had been a founder member of the Council, present on its committee since 1936 and Vice-Chairman since 1952. His efforts brought in new institutional and particularly corporate members; while ‘open’ membership brought in the academics. Whereas in 1950 the only subscriptions came from 8 banks, one insurance company and All Souls College; in 1955 Courtaulds, Boots, Reckitt and Colman, Shell Mex-BP, Tootal’s, Richard
Thomas and Baldwin already gave a broader business and industrial base. Most money, however, still came from the banks.

Other institutional constituencies reflecting the interests of local archivists, librarians and academics also grew apace. In 1965, for example, when almost all the 275 subscriptions came from firms and institutions, 16 county councils were represented, 28 universities and colleges and 28 libraries (world wide). The last 5 names on the libraries list gives it's oecumenical flavour: 'South Australia, Stepney, Stockport, Sydney and Tottenham'. Both the British Council and B U P A were members. So also, for some years, was Mme Prunier's restaurant in St James. Commander Doble, appointed Secretary in 1960, after the death of Miss Shrigley and just before the sudden death of Stephen Twining, vigorously extended this list.

Enhanced membership with rising subscriptions carried other implications, because the commitments of the Council were not expanding to match the expectations of its members nor the possibilities created by the increasing budget. Its bulletin, Business Archives (supposedly a quarterly until 1965 but in fact usually appearing twice a year) was little more than a flimsy newsletter. Academics, I well remember, became rather disenchanted with the Council, whose activities in these years seemed to them to be growing further away from its potential. They remained represented on the executive committee but it was the professional archivists who had the determination to press their case for change, which came with some drama in Appeal Court No. 1 (The Master of the Rolls Court) at the A G M on 11 July 1968, under the rather startled authority of Lord Denning, the President; and the much more startled apprehension of the candidate who had been persuaded to stand in a contested election for Chairman. Most of those nominated as active honorary officers were challenged from the floor of the meeting or resigned on the spot or shortly afterwards, including the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, the Secretary, the Honorary Treasurer, the Editor and three members of the executive committee. It is to the eternal merit of Lord Denning that he presided with equanimity over this bloodless, and entirely constitutional coup in his own Court and guided the new chairman and the committee into smooth waters. Major Ingram, archivist of Baring Brothers, became Secretary, Sam Twining Vice-Chairman, thus cementing an old family and business alliance with the Council; links with the business world were further strengthened by new Vice-Presidents: the Earl of Cromer, Lord Pilkington and Sir Michael Cayzer. John Wadsworth, continuing as Research Adviser, greatly strengthened the continuity of the work of the Council in these years.
III  Recent Evolution

We now pass from history to current affairs. Nor can an incoming President of the B A C, then its incoming chairman, be objective in evaluating the subsequent events (at least until 1972). I hope it will be judged by more objective commentators than myself that a new lease of, if not life, then of much enhanced activity dates from 1968 and the new team that took responsibility for the fortunes of the Council in that summer. Business Archives was given much greater resources, with Richard Storey as editor, and became a serious journal, publishing articles of substance and lists of business records newly registered in the N R A and of business histories newly published. It thus became a journal of record, of direct utility to business historians. Training courses for business archivists were developed, of value to potential corporate members of the Council. Selective surveys, of shipping industry records (instituted before 1968) a jointly-organised survey of insurance records with the Chartered Insurance Institute, and a large scale survey of British banking records were all set on foot in these years. Activity increased in many directions with new injections of commitment and energy. After an initial fall in subscription income from £2,700 in 1968 to £2,140 in 1970 — doubtless due to the disturbance in the executive in 1968 — revenue climbed again (I was very relieved to know at the time) to £3,152 in 1972, which I certainly interpreted as evidence of confidence in the new regime.

I can, perhaps, be more objective in regard to the years since 1972, which have seen more momentous developments. Current members will not need to be reminded of the extent and financial scale of these new commitments: the Liquidation Monitoring Service, the Business Records Advisory Service and, above all in terms of external finance from the S S R C the new survey of the 1000 oldest registered companies in England and Wales, for which 525 surveys had been completed by June 1984 (which represented the documentation of the records of 1390 firms, including subsidiary companies). In addition the training activities have been much extended, in London and elsewhere, and the annual conference much enhanced.

This brings us full circle from 1934, indeed from 1932, with surveys (albeit of a different nature), advice to firms (if now much enhanced in professional standing through the training courses for their own potential archivists, as well as through supplying advice over their records), and in the preservation of records from destruction (which has been institutionalised through the Liquidation Monitoring Service as well as operating on an individual basis).
History never comes just full circle but is always a spiral of decline, or a spiral of enhancement and expansion. Both feed upon themselves and draw energy or inertia into the process. We can see from the record that the evolution of the Business Archives Council, over this first fifty years of its history has been, with interruptions, a cycle of enhancement and expansion. We must ensure that this also characterises the next fifty years in its evolution, and as President for the initiation of the new half century, I shall make every effort to bring this about.

References

1. This lecture owes much to John Armstrong, editor of Business Archives, and the office staff of B A C, who kindly provided me with xeroxes of letters, minutes of meetings of the executive committee, and other material in the B A C archives. Most other data has been taken from the published annual reports, annual accounts, newsletters, bulletins and other publications of the Council.


3. G N Clark’s surname appeared as ‘Clarke’.

4. N B Harte (ed.) The Study of Economic History (1971) pp. 71–86, esp. pp. 77–9. All Souls College had endowed the Chichele chair of Economic History, which meant that the holder of the chair was also elected into a professorial fellowship at the college, an association which still holds.

5. The evidence for these events covering the years 1932–4 lies in the archives of the B A C but it was generated within L S E. A file of papers concerning the foundation of the B A C was sent to A V Judges by the Deputy Secretary and Bursar of L S E in June 1937 and he evidently passed it on to the Council.

Letter from G N Clark to M M Postan of 31 January 1933 evidently in reply to an invitation to the meeting sent by Postan. On 19 January 1933 Postan had been asked to see the Director’s private secretary to make arrangements for the meeting.

Mrs Mair (Secretary of the Rockefeller Research Fund Committee) to Eileen Power 18 December 1933.

A V Judges to H Jenkinson 24 June 1933. These expectations were certainly mirrored within the British Records Association. In a report of 2 May 1933 to its Council Sir Matthew Nathan announced that ‘a movement was on foot to organise the preservation of Business Archives’ and he hoped he would ‘be able in due course to suggest the formation of a Business Archive Section of this Association’. This was endorsed by minutes of 15 July 1933, the annual report of the B R A for 1933 and in further minutes of 14 December 1933 and 9 February 1934. The foundation of the C P B A was announced to the B R A on 15 May 1934 by the Master of the Rolls who expressed the hope ‘in due course when the organisation was a little more advanced that this Council would become a Section of the British Records Association’. There does not seem to be any retrospective comment from either body as to why this joint expectation was never fulfilled. (I owe the references to the B R A material to the kindness of its current Hon. Secretary, Mr T R Padfield.)

He subsequently gave a donation of £100 in 1939, explaining that this was a fine he had levied upon himself for failure to attend meetings of the Council. See G N Clark, *loc. cit.*

A J Tweed had married a Twining. He quickly gave way to Stephen Twining in the ‘Twining connection’ of the B A C.

Three of those invited to sign the letter did not do so: Professor W R Scott; Lord Herbert Scott (President of the F B I) and S R Beale (President of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce). The letter was subsequently re-printed as a notice and used by the Council for publicity purposes.

The initial members of the Committee elected on 11 May 1934 were H M Cashmore, Librarian of the City of Birmingham, C R Fay, Conrad Gill, Richard Pares and Arnold Power; with William Piercy (until 1937) H A Shannon and A V Judges joint Secretaries, Edward Hoare as Hon. Treasurer, G N Clark as Chairman and Lord Hanworth as President.

15. This had been discussed in January 1950 in order to adopt a ‘less cumbersome title’ but the decision was postponed. I think that the Council was commonly known, informally, as the Business Archives Council, long before this official change of name. This title had been used in a letter from J Menken of the Business Administration Dept of L S E when replying to the original letter of invitation from the Director to come to a meeting on 27 January 1933.

16. Total income in this year was £51,642, most of the remainder in the form of grants, particularly from the Social Science Research Council, for particular projects.