

THE ICI ARCHIVE IN THE NORTH EAST

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Introduction

For the greater part of the last ten years, a small group of people has been trying to secure the future of an archive relating to the activities of ICI in the north east of England, principally at Billingham and Wilton. The process has had its successes and failures and its story illustrates many of the problems which must be facing the owners of industrial archives in Britain today.

Historical background

This article is not primarily about the history of the company nor of the archive but some historical introduction is needed to put the work into context.

During the First World War, Britain and Germany needed reliable supplies of nitrates for the production of explosives but the supply of natural mined nitrate from Chile was vulnerable to naval blockade. German chemists succeeded in developing a process to make ammonia, and hence nitrates, from atmospheric nitrogen and when the British Government tried to do the same they enlisted the aid of one of Britain's largest chemical companies, Brunner, Mond and Co., based in Cheshire. Brunner Mond had already considered a site for expansion at Billingham near Stockton on Tees and the government bought it for the projected ammonia plant. At the end of hostilities the government had no further interest in the project and they sold the site to Brunner Mond. After a fascinating tale of obtaining information from the Germans, Brunner Mond succeeded in making ammonia, first in a pilot plant at Winnington and then on a production scale at Billingham. At the end of 1926, Synthetic Ammonia and Nitrates Ltd, the company operating the Billingham factory, was taken into the new Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd as a subsidiary of Brunner Mond, one of the four companies merged to form ICI.

After the end of the First World War, the main use of ammonia was in the manufacture of fertilizers rather than explosives and these formed the core of Billingham production, which also included sulphuric, nitric and phosphoric acids, methanol and carbon dioxide. The process technology learnt at Billingham enabled the development of the process for making

petrol from coal and during the Second World War the Billingham factory was a major producer of aviation spirit. Other divisions of ICI built plants there for the manufacture of sodium, chlorine, Nylon and plastics. At one time Billingham was the largest chemical factory in the British Commonwealth and at its peak it employed 16,000 people.

After the end of the Second World War, ICI had started a new site further down the River Tees at Wilton and all the divisions of ICI were invited to build plants there. It was very successful, at one time employing a similar number of people to the peak at Billingham. Whereas Wilton had from the outset been a site based on petroleum chemicals as feedstock, Billingham had been based on coal, both as a source of energy and as a major process feedstock. By mid-century this was uneconomic and the change first to naphtha and then to natural gas had a major effect on the Billingham site. The old plants, many of which dated from the founding of the site in the early 1920s, were demolished and replaced. The number of people employed fell dramatically with the introduction of large single-stream plants. Prior to this the site was reminiscent of the chemical industry of the 19th century; after it the site looked like a chemical factory of today.

The Billingham enterprise had interests in many other companies such as fertilizer blenders and merchants and in a number of satellite factories, several of them set up for strategic reasons in the Second World War. It took over some of the salt company interests that pre-existed the ammonia factory at Billingham and was a significant producer of cement, plaster and plaster board, partly as an outlet for its by-products, gypsum and chalk. It also had considerable expertise in process engineering and in catalysis and was ICI's centre for the technology of processes such as ammonia and fertilizers, advising associated and subsidiary companies around the world.

Organisational change continued. Synthetic Ammonia and Nitrates Ltd had become the Billingham Division and after the Second World War the Division was split between Heavy Organic Chemicals and Agricultural, reflecting the rapidly increasing importance of organic chemicals, particularly at the Wilton and North Tees sites. Later the organic chemicals side became Petrochemicals Division, with new headquarters at Wilton, and then was merged with Plastics Division. In the 1980s, all of ICI's principal heavy chemicals interests were merged into Chemicals & Polymers and, for the first time since the formation of Billingham, the headquarters management left Billingham and Wilton to be based, as it started, in Cheshire.

Towards the end of the century, ICI's interests moved away from the processes and businesses based at Billingham. Through the 1990s many of the plants at Billingham were

demolished and the remainder sold to other companies. At Wilton and North Tees most of the ICI interests were sold. Now ICI has only a very small operating unit on Teesside.

History of the archive

ICI seems never to have had a clear and consistent policy of archiving for historical reasons. Of course it has long had established document management procedures but when they refer to archiving it is principally in relation to long term retention for business needs. The various divisions of the company have, therefore, developed independent historical archive policies and they have varied over time.

At Billingham the best aspect from the perspective of the present archive was the establishment, at the beginning of 1927, of a system of Central File Reports. These were the reports considered to be of more than departmental or short-term interest. They were registered, classified for confidentiality and issued under a well-regulated system of approved circulations and recall. Over time this became recognised as the place to keep reports of significance even though they were not originally issued as Central File Reports and many early documents found their way into the system years after their origination, which is why there are now reports in the series dating as far back as 1907. Approximately 50,000 reports were issued in this system and of those about 36,000 have survived. The administration of this report series required a small staff in a central registry and this became the focus for contributions of all kinds of memorabilia and documents. From the 1950s onwards, a series of supervisors of Central File kept adding to a collection which became a useful, and occasionally bizarre, miscellany of company and local history.

The retention of other material has not been so successful. The policy of departmental registries has generally been to hold files for about five years, and weeding for long-term retention was usually left to the originating manager, few of whom took any interest; most files were routinely destroyed at the end of that time. Even important registries such as the Directorate did not escape wholesale destruction when the attitude of the day was to be a slim organisation, unburdened by the past. However, important series such as the papers of the local management board (a board whose authority was delegated from the Main Board at Head Office) were transferred to the Central File and have survived complete.

After the company reorganisation in the 1980s, Billingham was no longer a divisional headquarters site. For a time the headquarters building was still in use and the Information Centre, containing the Library and Central File, remained though on reduced staffing. In the

1990s the headquarters building was vacated and the divestment of Billingham interests was clearly leading to a change in ownership of the Information Centre.

A small group of concerned individuals raised the matter with management. This group had a common interest in the archive's future and remained involved throughout the ensuing saga, and ultimately did much of the work. One of the original group, a process chemist, still worked for ICI. Another, an historian by origin and at one time manager of the Library and Central File, was running his own consultancy business, and two were former engineers, both retired but working part time for ICI on other matters. This small group of people loosely constituted the archive team.

Interest generated by the archive team led to a project to move all the archive material to a new Record Management Centre (the RMC) at Wilton. The main purpose of the building was to bring under one management all the surviving registries at Billingham and Wilton and its staff worked almost entirely on the needs of the operating businesses, particularly on the dispersal of documentation associated with a series of business divestments. The document storage and associated offices occupied about half of the 40,000 square feet available in a large modern building intended for a generation of computers that hardly had time to appear before they were superseded by PCs and networks. The historical archive material occupied a small fraction of the total space, most of which was given over to normal business record management.

Concerns did not end there as the divestment of the Wilton plants was proceeding and the signs were that ICI would be relinquishing the Wilton site in the near future. The archive team started to consider what would happen if the company were to divest all its interests in the region. The team felt that one of the best ways to safeguard the archive would be to increase public knowledge and use of it and the belief was beginning to emerge that the only real solution was to move the collection to somewhere like the Teesside Archives, the local County Record Office. Unlike the previous move, where the interests of the archive team and the company were largely the same, this time there was the possibility of disagreement. However, the local management were broadly supportive of the idea in theory, subject to an extensive review of the material for confidential or sensitive matters. Two members of the archive team were commissioned to do this and, to cover the commercial aspects, the management appointed a third member who had retired after a long career in fertilizer sales and marketing.

Soon after the start of this work, an offer was made by the CEO of Syntex, the ICI catalyst business still based at Billingham, to provide a permanent home for the historical material.

The archive team had not lost hope of keeping an independent ICI archive and there was no shortage of individuals in the company with pride in the local ICI history; so the suggestion readily gained support and around 800 shelf metres of rolling shelving was installed in a room set aside for the purpose. There was no environmental control but the clean, dry office conditions were at least as good as anything the archive had been in before and most of the material was unlikely to suffer from it. So in due course the archive went the 20 miles back from Wilton to Billingham, augmented by a quantity of Wilton archive material. The Billingham Archive was officially opened on 27 January 2000 by the then company chairman at the invitation of the local CEO.

The Billingham Archive had spare space and the message was spread around, both inside and outside the company, that it would accept suitable material. At about that time the Group Head Office was moving to a smaller building and they took the opportunity to send some of their material to Billingham. This was not the true Head Office archive, which is in contract storage outside London, but departmental registry collections of historical material and memorabilia; some very interesting indeed but overall a rather miscellaneous lot. The archive also received some small personal donations. No policy was developed for transferring business material from the working records which still remained at Wilton and elsewhere; the archive was by then seen from within ICI as an existing entity, not as a developing collection.

Dispersal of the archive

It was known at the time of the move that nothing is for ever and that ICI's Syntex business was itself vulnerable to divestment. However, it was something of a disappointment when in the summer of 2002 it was announced that the business was to be sold and that the sale would be completed in June 2003. The negotiations for such deals are conducted in secret and the archive team knew nothing of what was happening until the official announcement. It then became clear that the negotiators had overlooked the presence of the ICI archive on the Syntex premises: the material was not included in the sale but neither had any thought been given to moving it elsewhere.

It was by now clear that it would be foolish to attempt another internal solution to the problem. Ever since the early alarms of the mid-1990s, discussions had taken place from time to time with possible public repositories and the local County Archivist was well aware of the problem. It was now time to start the serious business of dispersing the collection outside ICI and the identification of organisations interested in taking parts of it began.

Whilst the Teesside Archives was clearly the prime candidate it was equally clear that there was far too much material for them to accommodate. With the complications of splitting the collection it was impossible to place all the material in external collections in the time available, not least because much of the material still needed detailed assessment. What could not be dispersed immediately would have to return to the RMC at Wilton, now only on lease from a new owner until the middle of 2005. It was obviously desirable to reduce the bulk of this material as far as possible so effort was concentrated on those parts of the collection which could be dispersed quickly. Even so it was necessary to negotiate for a delayed departure from Billingham, something the new owners kindly agreed to. In the event the archives were clear of the Billingham building by early August 2003.

Work started with a fresh review of what was in the archive. During the two and a half years that the collection was at Billingham its care had been severely under-resourced. The enthusiasm of the CEO who offered the accommodation was not matched by the registry staff to whom this was additional work for which no resources had been allocated; the archive was not even mentioned in their job descriptions. The present author, on a voluntary basis and very much part-time, was able to provide advice on the archive's content and had sorted and listed some of the new acquisitions, but the collection was nowhere near properly catalogued when the time came for its dispersal. One of the first tasks in the dispersal was to open some of the boxes for the first time to discover what was in them.

Content of the archive

At this stage it is appropriate to describe what was in the archive when the time came to disperse it. To give some idea of size, the 800m of shelves were about 90% full in addition to the photographic negatives accommodated separately in a series of filing cabinets.

Central File reports

This consisted of two series of reports, the confidential and the non-confidential reports, filling about 170 shelf metres and containing approximately 36,000 reports, mostly foolscap or A4 stapled into soft covers. Some single report numbers covered a whole run of separate monthly reports which filled a shelf. They were all boxed in numerical order and the original card index had been transferred to electronic format some years before. The earliest report was dated 1907 though there were few before about 1920. The series effectively ended in the mid-1980s from when all reports were issued under a company-wide system. The subject range was enormous and covered technical, commercial and management matters. The

technical reports covered chemical processes, engineering (especially instrumentation, metallurgy and solids handling), chemistry, agriculture (in a wide sense as ICI offered a farm advisory service as part of its fertilizer sales activity) and there were specialisms such as about 300 reports relating to coal. The commercial topics included product and market development, and studies of national economies as potential overseas markets. The management topics included employee welfare and amenities, development of sites, discussions with local authorities, financial reviews and so on.

Oil Works files

Oil Works was a significant part of the Billingham factory, opened in 1935 for the production of petrol and other organic products by the hydrogenation of coal. After the war it changed to producing a wide range of organic chemicals from other feedstocks and finally closed in the mid-1990s. Uniquely amongst the Billingham plants, a large volume of its production and engineering records had survived. After preliminary sorting at the time the Works closed there were still over 200 shelf metres of boxes to place in the archive. The majority of the material consisted of production records, sometimes down to the level of daily log sheets, along with a quantity of technical information about the plants. It was un-indexed, indeed largely unidentified beyond the labelling of the boxes.

Personnel Department files

Through the interest of a former senior personnel manager on Teesside, the files from various personnel registries had been weeded and a proportion, considered of historical interest, retained. There are no personal records of any sort in the archive and these files were examined to ensure that none remained there inadvertently. The record was mainly of employee welfare, joint consultation meetings, negotiations with trade unions and general labour policy. This occupied approximately 15 shelf metres with a further 25 shelf metres on similar subjects from Central Personnel Department at Head Office. Again, it was un-indexed though the boxes of material originating on Teesside were labelled with date ranges and source locations.

General Archive

This is the section that had been accumulated in the Central File over many years and it occupied approximately 140 shelf metres. The content ranged from a single salary slip donated by a former employee to a series of bound volumes of factory monthly reports

running from 1921 to 1975, a detailed and extremely useful record of site activities and statistics. It also included a set of all the First World War Ministry of Munitions reports relevant to Billingham. Most of the material was catalogued on an electronic database (not the same one as the reports and in a different format).

Film and video

ICI maintained a number of film production units and there had been one at Billingham. Sadly all records of the unit had disappeared and the collection of films that remained was but a fraction of its output. Most of the films had been made for training purposes though there were some which were intended for general communications and historical record. Some of them are quite well known and extracts have been shown on television from time to time. About half of the material was on 16mm film and the remainder on video tape, in various formats. This occupied about 20 shelf metres and it had been possible to compile a fairly good catalogue while the material was in the archive.

Photographs

ICI also had photographic units both at Billingham and at Wilton. The first chief photographer at Billingham, a man called Sidney Boyle, had produced a fine collection of photographs of the early Billingham plants. Sadly the Billingham photographs from before 1970 had been savagely weeded, so thoroughly that even the catalogues had gone, making it difficult to identify the photographs that survived by accident elsewhere. Apart from that, almost all the negatives from both photographic departments were in the archive collection. The various albums and boxes of prints occupied about 35 shelf metres and the negatives, estimated to be about 400,000 images, were in filing cabinets. Of course, a great many of these images were of trivial details such as broken shafts and retirement presentations to unrecorded personnel but some were more interesting. Unfortunately, identification was a problem as even the modern records were very sketchy. Most of the pre-1970 Billingham photographs to have survived had been identified and substantial progress was being made towards cataloguing them when they had to be moved elsewhere.

Engineering records

All engineering records for any extant plant were passed to the new owners and what was left was generally rather dull information relating to plant modifications and extensions dating from the 1950s and 1960s. A run of project management files for a plant built in the

1970s had been placed in the archive, mainly as an illustration of management methods of the time, and there were a number of boxes of folded sheet blueprints of interesting early equipment. The archive had about 30 shelf metres of various engineering records. The main engineering drawing records, which remained at Wilton during the temporary absence of the remainder of the archive, included two virtually complete sets of the entire Plastics Division engineering drawings file on microfilm, one set of which was boxed and occupied over 50 shelf metres, and all the surviving Billingham drawings on microfilm, some of which dated back to the 1920s.

Miscellaneous

Nine metres of shelf was occupied with artefacts of one sort or another, including some trophies and cups awarded for safety achievements or for sports. About eleven metres of shelf were records of the two main staff clubs on Teesside: Norton Hall and Wilton Castle. There was also a substantial amount of miscellaneous archive material from Head Office, some of which appeared to have once been part of the formal Head Office archive.

New homes

The first step was to deal with the simplest matters. The Head Office material was listed in outline and discussed with the staff there. Some of it was merged with the Billingham collection, for example spare copies of the company magazine, which ran from 1928 to 1993 interrupted only by the Second World War, were used to complete the Billingham run. Most of the remainder was repacked and returned to London; the residue was scrapped.

One of the most interesting parts of the work was the placement of artefacts which included two Wedgwood vases from Winnington Hall, a longcase clock from the Lowther family at Wilton Castle, oil paintings of some former ICI chairmen, a bronze bust of Alfred Nobel and a nickel silver model of the original ICI head office at No 9 Millbank. The homes found for these included the Bowes Museum in County Durham, The Royal Society and the RIBA Drawings Collection. Most of the local artefacts were of less value but some were taken by local museums and have already been on display in the Billingham Art Gallery, attracting quite a lot of local interest.

Another relatively simple matter was the film and video collection. The North East Region Film and Television Archive had recently received a Lottery grant to build a new store on the Teesside University campus. This made it the obvious choice both in terms of location and expertise and the ICI material was about the first to be moved into the new building.

The photographic collection took more negotiation. It was large, and rather technical in content. It could have gone to the Teesside Archives but it was realised early on that they would have great difficulty accommodating the documentary material without the added burden of the photographs. The North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish had recently received funding for a new artefact and photograph store, they have all the necessary curatorial experience, they are used to industrial records and their acquisition policy is regional so it covers the ICI sites on Teesside. The ICI collection was large compared with their existing holdings but after some discussion they agreed to take it. The agreement with them includes a provision that they are to endeavour to share the resource with the Teesside Archives, something which should not be too difficult with modern technology. They are also encouraged to propose classes of photographs which they consider not worth preserving or which they would like to retain on a sample basis only.

Some of the engineering records of Oil Works were kept by one of the businesses as they still have some relevance to modern plant designs. However, it was recognised that there are very few people interested in that kind of detail and most of the operational and engineering detail was scrapped.

The obvious documentary records which could be released were then set aside for transfer to the Teesside Archives and packed for despatch. Work was concentrated on oversize items and on obvious large blocks which were uncontentious as far as ICI was concerned. The residue of the archive then went the twenty miles back from Billingham to Wilton.

Releasing to the public

There were now just two part-time members of the archive team working on assessing the remaining material from the General Archive part of the collection. Both knew from long service in the company what needed to be kept for business reasons and the ICI Records Manager also provided clear guidance. The hard part was applying it to over 200 bankers' boxes full of documents, stacked four high on the floor. The material was catalogued in a variety of databases and card indexes at the level of title and author but virtually nothing was indexed by content.

We had already discovered that the original confidentiality grading, which had been done for internal reasons and with no thought of public access, was completely irrelevant. Confidential and Company Secret grades had usually been given for commercial reasons which usually have only short term relevance but we had to be particularly careful where other companies might be involved.

A key issue was anything personal. It has already been stated that the archive does not contain any personal personnel records. These are kept quite separately and come under a strict company policy of confidentiality and destruction which has always applied, regardless of the Data Protection Act. Unfortunately there is no system for retaining any information from these records and after the due retention period it will not be possible to answer any questions about former employees and their careers in the company, even of people who have distinguished themselves. That is one of the reasons why the company magazines are likely to be useful as they often contain short biographies of employees who had achieved some kind of distinction.

The company takes the Data Protection Act very seriously indeed but is unfamiliar with its implication for archivists so we obtained a copy of the guidelines produced jointly by the (then) Public Records Office, the Society of Archivists and the Records Management Society. This was very useful but rather long and complicated for the purpose so we extracted the key sections relevant to our needs and provided a three page explanatory note. The policy was tested when it came to a run of engagement registers starting in 1920 and of discharge registers from 1941 in impressive hand-written ledgers. The engagement registers were not very sensitive and they seemed worth keeping because they gave the area the men came from, the work they went to in the factory and their hourly rate of pay. However, the discharge registers gave the reason for leaving, which was sometimes 'dismissal', and we were asked to destroy them. In the end we did keep just one discharge register, the earliest we had which ran from 1941 to 1946. The records of this period seemed more interesting anyway as they logged the movement of men in and out of the armed forces. The later ones, which gradually became more perfunctory and less useful, were destroyed.

The personal data issue which did cause some distress to us from an historical point of view was that of fatal accidents. There was a collected report of a few fatal accidents which occurred in the 1920s. It gave brief details of the accident (no more than would typically appear in the press) and what the company's actions were with respect to the widow and dependents. The company considered that to be far too sensitive and it has been destroyed. A number of investigation reports on later fatal accidents which survived in the Central File Reports series have also gone, not because the company is sensitive about the accidents but because of concern about personal data.

The next phase was to deal with the Central File Reports and by this time the archive team had effectively reduced to one part-time volunteer. The Teesside Archives had received a massive influx of material over a comparatively short space of time and they were fast

running out of space. It was impossible for them to take the whole 170 shelf metres of the reports file, even if the company had been willing to release it, and they knew that they would have virtually no public demand for the highly technical reports. We preferred to keep at least some of the reports in the Teesside area as that is where they are most likely to be used, so we resigned ourselves to the inevitability of breaking up the series. Attempts were made to identify other repositories, perhaps ones with special interests in technology or engineering. However, all collections are short of space, most have strict geographical acquisition rules and few have relevant technical subject specialisms. We did try the Science Museum in London but they are full; they would not even take the items which two of their curatorial staff had said they would like to have when they first saw them in the mid-1990s.

The reports file is catalogued on a database which gives report number, title, author, date and place of origin. Using that, every one of the reports up to 1959 was given an approximate subject identification and a grade of interest from one to four. After 1959, where far fewer are being retained, they were only identified as being in one of the two most interesting grades, roughly corresponding to 'important' and 'worth keeping'. Several hundred reports were taken out and briefly examined, usually because the titles were hopelessly obscure, but one person categorising 36,000 items on that amount of information is bound to be making errors. A bias was adopted towards management and general interest rather than science or technology as that is what the public visiting a county record office will find more useful. The final stage of selection involved a more detailed review of a few categories which might have contained sensitive information.

After some adjustments the quantity was estimated and discussed with the Archivist at the Teesside Archives. He agreed to accept these and generously agreed to provide most of the staff time needed to do the picking of some 6,000 reports out of 36,000 stored in 1,200 boxes. Unfortunately, almost 1,000 reports that were selected from the database for retention were found to be missing from the files, though this disappointment was somewhat lessened by finding a handful of interesting reports which were not known to be there. The majority of the selected reports are going to the Teesside Archives but a not insignificant number are being found appropriate homes in nearly ten other locations. Now, apart from a few items being retained by ICI for business reasons, the residue is being destroyed. However, looking back over the exercise now that it is complete, it is fair to say that much of the discarded technical material is not only of narrow interest but also trivial and transitory.

The final task of any magnitude is to go through the Billingham engineering drawing registers to extract the more interesting microfilms. This is a tedious task as there are more

than 200,000 drawings listed, and frustrating, as the ones that appear to be the most interesting are the ones that are most often missing. Then only the tidying up of the record of what we did will remain to be finished after the RMC is finally vacated in the middle of this year.

The long term prospects

Transferring a collection such as this to a public archive is not an easy step to take. We have given much thought to how to regulate the access but there is little that can be done in practice. It is so much easier to run an archive within the company even if public access is allowed: rules can be changed, reasons for wanting to see something can be questioned, individuals can politely be refused access. In the present case there was absolutely no question of the company being prepared to run an archive or even to pay for storing the material any longer. The only restrictions available to us have been closure periods; generally we have used 50 years from date of origin where restrictions were necessary. We have also stipulated that documents may not be put on the internet: we have in our minds an image of some anonymous internet nerd scanning the world to see where he can stir up mischief and we feel more comfortable with the thought of the person who takes the trouble to go to the archive and sign the visitors' book.

Almost everything transferred to public repositories has been done on deposit agreements so that anything can, in theory, be recovered by the company. Our greatest fear in the archive team is that a member of the public will find something which enables them to embarrass the company. The company might then review the arrangement and remove the material from the public archives. Under such circumstances the company might have neither the resources nor the interest to be selective and, having nowhere to put the material, it would be destroyed.

Alternative solutions

In retrospect the decision to move material into the public domain should have been taken earlier. In the North West, where the ICI companies are much older, a decision was taken several decades ago to transfer pre-merger (that is pre-1926) material to the Cheshire County Record Office. That was known of at Billingham but was not mirrored there as their material was not as old. When it would have been sensible to start, in the late 1980s, no one took any interest. Even in the late-1990s, when there was clearly an approaching crisis, decisions were taken that in retrospect look remarkably like clutching at straws. Discussions with our

County Archivist on Teesside did start but were exploratory rather than earnest. The mood was one of thinking that a long-term ICI solution was possible.

There was serious investigation of an independent trust to look after the material but that foundered for a number of reasons. Partly it was because the archive team did not trust corporate owners in the long term. It was not that the present management were anything but committed to the principle of preserving the records but in the future the businesses could be sold to a company, probably not even based in this country, with no interest in our local history (or indeed in any history) and unwilling to spend money on understanding what was in the archive they had acquired. Apparently some US companies now regard archive documents as troublesome and are developing a culture of prompt destruction of working documents. Protecting against that would have needed a trust deed that took away significant rights of the owner, something which would have been resisted. Another problem was financial viability. Even if the material had been accommodated free of charge by the county archives, there would still have been costs in managing the trust. If there had been a crisis in the future, the trustees would have had to find significant money for legal fees and perhaps for relocation expenses, but there was never going to be any source of income. The third problem was of independence. A member of the company's legal staff, who very generously helped us to think the problem through, pointed out that the trust deed would have to be drawn up by a lawyer who was independent of the company. That would have cost money too.

At various stages we considered the possibility of external funding but our team was too small and inexperienced to contemplate an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The matter was settled when we were told quite categorically that we would not get a grant anyway: along the lines of 'ICI would be expected to sort out its own problems'. We saw that the only opportunity to qualify for external help was to get the collection away into independent care.

Conclusions

We regret that there was not more time to get the archive into better shape before it left the company, for example removing trivia and duplications, but we had no resources to do it. We admit that the archive is patchy. We much regret that some interesting material has been lost, some of it known to have been in existence comparatively recently. Within the resources available we have searched as diligently as we could for missing items. We often

wish that more material had been set aside for the historical archive; there are things that we would have made room for had we had them.

We tried to do the right thing and respect material that looked significant. A substantial survival of a report run containing material from eight decades looked like a series to be respected. We failed to keep it intact but we hope to have captured the best of it.

We wish that there were a time after which matters became mere history and we could stop worrying about making them public. Sadly, society now has the leisure to go back decades and play the game of judging the actions of the day against the standards that apply now. Because of that, together with the transient nature of organisations and the use of electronic communications, we are losing the record of today. The archive we have been working on contains not a scrap of record of all those business divestments of the 1990s.

The work will soon be at an end, though a couple of members of the archive team may be able to potter over to the Teesside Archives and offer some (possibly unwanted) advice. The team did not include a professional archivist but we learnt a lot as we went along and we probably did as much as could have been done under the circumstances. We are grateful for all the advice and encouragement from a host of contacts, mostly known only by telephone. We are hugely indebted to those many people who have made enormous efforts to find space for our material. We hope that the archive, in its various new homes, is appreciated and found to be useful.

Finally, ICI and especially their Records Manager in the North East, Mrs Yvonne Joy, must be thanked. Firstly for funding so much of the operation and secondly for being so tolerant of this small group of pensioned amateurs who should have been cultivating their gardens instead of pestering the life out of busy people.

Further reading

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W.J.Reader, *Imperial Chemical Industries - a history, volume 2 the first quarter-century 1926-1952* (Oxford University Press, 1975)

V.E.Parke, *Billingham – the first ten years* (ICI Billingham Division, 1957)