

Report of the Business Archives Surveying Officer for Scotland 2023-4

Rachael Muir, Business Archives Surveying Officer

Background

The UK has a long tradition of undertaking national, regional and sectoral surveys of the historical records of business.¹ However, Scotland is unique in having had a dedicated surveying officer for business records since 1977, when the post was established by the Business Archives Council of Scotland and supported by a grant-in-aid from the then Scottish Records Office. Building on the work of earlier regional surveys led by the National Register of Archives for Scotland, this post has been crucial to the preservation and development of Scottish business archives for nearly 50 years.

There have been 18 surveying officers in all and between them they have witnessed a period of profound economic change in Scotland. From the decline of shipbuilding and textile manufacturing in the 1980s, to the 2008 recession and crisis in the oil and gas industry, the surveying officer has been on hand to rescue, preserve and promote the industrial and business heritage of Scotland. Over the years, surveys have ranged from listing a few volumes to surveying hundreds of metres of records that are now major corporate archives of internationally-renowned businesses. The existence of a surveying officer in Scotland has made a huge contribution to the status of the business archives sector and helped to ensure that Scotland has a wealth of business and business-related archives.

The role continued until 2010 when it fell into abeyance for four years. In 2014 the surveying officer role was revived by a consortium of partners, led by the Ballast Trust, a charity which specialises in the rescue, sorting and cataloguing of business archives. Today the post is funded by the Lind Foundation, supported by donations from

¹ Lesley Richmond and Alison Turton, 'Business Archive Surveying in the UK: An Exploration of Past Achievement' *Archives* (2022) 57:2, pp.105-39.

businesses and, since 2021, a new funding partnership with the National Records of Scotland.

The current business archives surveying officer is Rachael Muir who can be contacted² by anyone aware of any business records at risk in Scotland and anyone requiring advice on the care and management of business archives. Examples of her work can be found on the surveying officer's website.³

Annual Report for the Year to 31 March 2024

It was a varied 12 months for the business archives surveying officer, with two thematic surveys, several records at risk cases, recruitment and consultancy work. Over 130 businesses were contacted in 2023-4 with 27 surveys completed, and an overall response rate of 20 per cent. This was an increase on the average response rate, of 10-15 per cent, that has been standard for business archive surveyor work in the past.

Several unique surveys were undertaken during the year, including a survey of one of the earliest examples of a community-interest company (CIC) in Scotland. This involved the surveying officer travelling to Glenelg in north-west Scotland to visit the offices of the Glenachulish Preservation Trust, which works to preserve the last remaining turntable ferry in Scotland.

A new thematic survey on the natural environment and outdoor economy was launched in the summer of 2023. This led to several first-time surveys for organisations including the Glencoe Mountain Resort, Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Scottish Tourist Guides Association, Action to Protect Rural Scotland and the John Muir Trust, two of which have now been transferred to relevant archive services.

During the year the surveying officer also developed a remote survey questionnaire which was successfully completed by the European Marine Energy Centre as part of

² Contact e-mail: surveyingofficer@glasgow.ac.uk.

³ See <<https://surveyingofficer.co.uk/testimonies/>> accessed 16 December 2024.

work with the renewables sector. It provided a useful insight into their physical and digital holdings and allowed for a report setting out recommendations to be prepared. By having such a questionnaire to hand, it allows surveys to be conducted remotely in the first instance, where travel, time and money are a restriction, and then planning can take place for a more detailed in-person survey if required.

The surveying officer continued to work as the lead representative for Scotland on the UK Crisis Management Team. The team has existed since 2009 to organise agreed responses to business archives under threat and to monitor and assist in steering records at risk into suitable homes. There have been a high number of at-risk cases in 2023-4, with at least 23 Scottish cases investigated. Most notably, this included the well-known brands of Ted Baker and Hunter Boots, but unfortunately no progress was made in identifying any surviving records. However, there were successes. The records of Alexander Wilkies, retailer, were surveyed and transferred to Fife Archives, and a small number of records were identified following the closure of Cairncross of Perth, jewellers, after 154 years of trading, and transferred to Culture Perth and Kinross. Ishbel MacKinnon, archivist at Culture Perth and Kinross, noted:

‘When its closure was announced earlier this year the business archives surveying officer got in touch and offered to help with the salvage of any business records - which I accepted without hesitation. She alerted me to an early records survey of the business, negotiated access with the owners, salvaged the records from the premises and deposited them in the archive. This saved me an enormous amount of time and ensured that the records were preserved in a safe and timely manner.’

Nearly two years after initial contact was made with the owners of Peter Greig & Co., Scotland's last linen factory, by Chris Cassells (surveying officer 2018-21), Rachael was delighted to secure the safe transfer of the company's archive to Fife Archives. This case demonstrates that a significant amount of time is often required to ensure the long-term preservation of records, well beyond the moment of an initial survey. Andrew Dowsey, archives and local studies manager, Fife Archives, was appreciative of the surveying officer's intervention:

‘When Peter Greig & Co. went into liquidation, I was worried that their archive had been lost. I am grateful to Rachael Muir, business archives surveying officer, for tracking the records down, identifying the records worth permanent preservation and for helping to persuade the owner to donate the records to Fife Archives’.

Consultancy work was steady throughout the year. In autumn 2023, Rachael supported James Johnston & Co. of Elgin Ltd, manufacturer and retailer of tweeds, knitwear and woven accessories, in the recruitment of their first corporate archivist. As one of the oldest businesses in Scotland, Johnstons of Elgin was first surveyed by the National Register of Archives for Scotland several decades ago, and re-surveyed ten years ago in 2013. However, it wasn’t until the most recent survey and consultancy report in 2023, that the company decided to proceed with recruiting their own record-keeping professional and now have an archivist in post.

Further consultancy work has involved undertaking eight days of historical research for J.C. Peacock & Co., formerly shipping charterers, now salt merchants, as part of their 150th anniversary this year. Newly-found information is currently being used to prepare a commemorative corporate history. Consultancy time has also been secured for the surveying officer to catalogue the Scottish Women’s Institute collection. For one day a week, over a six-month period, Rachael has developed a catalogue of the collection providing a clearer understanding of the various records the collection contains.

The archive work of sporting organisations has also featured regularly this year, and the surveying officer attended the Sporting Heritage’s Scotland network event at the University of Stirling last summer. Rachael managed a stand which promoted the surveying officer’s services with postcards and a new ‘records for sporting organisations’ guidance designed and printed for the event. The event allowed Rachael to share past survey success, like that relating to St Johnstone Football Club, St Mirren Football Club and Queen’s Park Bowling Club. Time was also spent identifying and contacting those clubs with significant anniversaries coming up in the next ten years. This resulted in two surveys, one of which was undertaken remotely by reviewing

Aberdeen Football Club's heritage inventory, whilst the other took place at Airdrieonians.

A new element to surveying officer's work in 2023-4 has been the development of cataloguing placements undertaken by student volunteers and supervised by the surveying officer. Rachael has provided regular practical on-site sessions to support two students, with the cataloguing of the Scotland's Garden Scheme archive, as well as the records of Goodfellow & Steven Group Ltd, a bakery chain based in Broughty Ferry. This has been a successful and satisfying piece of work to provide continued professional development to those beginning their careers in the archives sector, whilst also providing a valuable follow-up for two organisations that were keen to build on the survey experience and develop their archives further.

The year ahead looks exciting with the launch of another thematic survey, this time contacting those in the timber and forestry sector, as well as a new regional partnership that will see surveys launched in Angus.

Crisis Management and Records at Risk

Many businesses and organisations were contacted where the records, due to closures, mergers or insolvencies, were thought to be at risk.

- Alexander Wilkie Ltd, established 1898, retailer, national (Kirkcaldy store surveyed)
- Balgownie Rentals Ltd, established 1907, agriculture, Turriff
- Balmanno House, established 1874, care home, Glasgow
- Bonar Yarns Ltd, established c.1970, fabric manufacturer, Dundee
- Cairncross of Perth, established 1869, jewellers, Perth
- David Bryson & Sons Ltd, established 1933, motor company, Prestwick
- Edinburgh City Football Club Ltd, established 1928/1986, football club, Edinburgh

- Foodmek Ltd, established 1971, food and drinks processing equipment supplier, Tayport
- Glasgow Play-Resource Association, established c.1984, charity, Glasgow
- HIV Scotland, established 1994, charity, Glasgow
- Hunter Boot Ltd [North British Rubber Co.], established 1856, retailer, Edinburgh
- Huntly and District Ex-Servicemen's Club Ltd, established 1920, social club, Huntly
- J. & G. Innes Ltd, established 1879, book retailer, St Andrews
- J.S. Crawford Contracts (Borders) Ltd, established 1946, construction, Melrose
- Kilgraston School Ltd, established 1930, independent school, Bridge of Earn
- Lows Butcher (George A. Low & Sons), established c.1970, butcher, Glasgow
- Scott & Paterson Ltd, established 1983, printer, Dunfermline
- Scottish Agricultural Industries Ltd, established 1928, agriculture, Edinburgh
- Scottish Women's Institute SCIO, established 1917, charity and membership organisation, Edinburgh
- Stewart & Shields Ltd, established 1950s, construction, Helensburgh
- Tayside Aviation Ltd, established 1968, training school, Dundee
- Ted Baker Holdings Ltd, established 1988, retail brand, Glasgow
- Walter Shearer Ltd, established 1897, candle makers, Glasgow

Record surveys, advice and consultancy work

- Aberdeen Football Club Ltd, established 1903, sports club, Aberdeen. Remote survey completed via inventory and recommendations report sent.
- Action to Protect Rural Scotland, established 1926, charity, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent. Records due to be deposited with Historic Environment Scotland.
- Airdrieonians Football and Athletic Company Ltd, established 1878, sports club, Airdrie. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Angels' Share Glass Ltd, established 2013, glassblower and manufacturer, Stirling. Survey completed and recommendations report sent. Records due to be deposited with the University of Stirling Archives.

- Cairncross of Perth, established 1869, jewellers, Perth. Closure of business. Survey undertaken and records transferred to Perth and Kinross Archives.
- Craig & Rose Ltd, established 1829, paint manufacturer, Edinburgh. Survey of business completed and recommendations report sent. Further survey of the family section of the archive undertaken and records gifted to Edinburgh City Archives.
- The Crolla Ice Cream Co. Ltd, established 1895, ice-cream manufacturer, Rutherglen. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- The High School of Glasgow, established 1124, school, Glasgow. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Isle of Skye Ferry Community Interest Company / Glenachulish Preservation Trust, established 2007/2011, charity, Glenelg. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Glencoe Mountain Ltd, established 1956, resort, Glencoe. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Inverkeithing Local History Society, established 1992, membership organisation, Inverkeithing. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- J.C. Peacock & Co. Ltd, established 1784, salt supplier, Ayr. Survey completed and recommendations report sent. Eight days of historical research undertaken as part of preparation for a commemorative publication to mark the company's 150th anniversary.
- John Dansken & Purdie, established 1858, chartered quantity surveyors, Glasgow. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- John Muir Trust, established 1983, conservation charity, Pitlochry. Survey completed and recommendations report sent. Records due to be transferred with Highland Archives.
- Newsquest Ltd, established 1996, newspaper publisher, Ardrossan. Survey undertaken. Some titles deposited with local authority archives and libraries.
- Paper Foundation, established 2020, charity, Cumbria. Work undertaken as part of Scottish records at risk case from the closure of Stoneywood paper mill in Aberdeen Survey completed and recommendations report sent.

- Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, established 1784, membership organisation, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Forestry Trust SCIO, established 1984, charity, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Plant Owners Association, established 1950, trade association, Stirling. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Rugby Union, established 1873, professional body, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Tourist Guides Association, established 1959, professional body, Stirling. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust, established 1964, charity, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Scottish Women's Institute SCIO, established 1917, charity and membership organisation, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent. Supported the institute with a successful records-at-risk application and a cataloguing project is ongoing.
- Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen, established 1587, membership body, Aberdeen. Engagement and support visit to offer advice on cataloguing strategy and tools. Project passed to colleagues at National Register of Archives for Scotland for taking forward.
- Sight Scotland (formerly Royal Blind), established 1793, charity, Edinburgh. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- Goodfellow & Steven Group Ltd, established 1873, bakery, Dunfermline. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.
- St Mirren Football Club Ltd, established 1877, sports club, Paisley. Survey completed and recommendations report sent.