

## *Viewpoint*

# **The Ballast Trust: Celebrating 30 Years of Understanding Technical Records**

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In November 2018, the Ballast Trust held a reception at the Riverside Museum in Glasgow to launch its publication *The Business of Archives: A Labour of Love*, produced to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Trust. Dr William Lind established the Ballast Trust in 1988 to provide a rescue, sorting and cataloguing service for business and industrial records with a special focus on improving the understanding and importance of technical records (plans, drawings and photographs). Preparing the publication gave cause to reflect on the present landscape of business archives in Scotland which owes much to the outstanding efforts of individuals and organisations that have, over many decades, co-operated to tackle the gargantuan task of identifying and saving a vital part of the documented national memory. William Lind (known as Bill) was one of these individuals and the story of Bill and the Ballast Trust cannot be told without placing it in the context of the broader landscape of 20th-century efforts to preserve Scotland's business heritage.

The curation of business archives in Scotland enjoys a long pedigree and can be traced back to 1957, with the appointment of Sydney Checkland to the new Chair in Economic History at the University of Glasgow. Within two years, Checkland had established the Colquhoun Lectureship and appointed Peter L. Payne to the post, which was created with a remit that included collecting and collating the surviving records of historical value from local businesses as well as teaching: 'For Checkland and his colleagues, a collection of business records was seen as "the essential prerequisite for an orderly attack upon the study of British business history".'<sup>1</sup> In this way the Department laid the foundations of the Scottish Business Archive at the University of Glasgow by beginning to collect the historical records of business and industry for the first time. This growing academic interest was further encouraged by the establishment of the Business Archives Council of Scotland (BACS) in 1960, seen by Hosker and Giffen in their 2005 article on Scottish business archives as a 'major step towards improving the

<sup>1</sup> The Colquhoun Lectureship, a University of Glasgow web resource published to mark 50 years of the Department of Economic and Social History in 2007, available at [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_213982\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_213982_en.pdf).

status of business archives and business history in Scotland'.<sup>2</sup> In the following years, the Colquhoun lecturer continued his active surveying work in Glasgow and the surrounding area, and three innovative surveys by the National Register of Archives for Scotland were set up, in the west, east and north-east of Scotland to identify archives in private hands just as manufacturing and heavy industry began to decline. This activity encouraged the survey, rescue and deposit of archives, including the purchase from liquidators of the records of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders by national and local authorities, and the establishment of the University of Dundee's collection of jute and linen archives. In 1967 the publication of Peter Payne's seminal work *Studies in Scottish Business History* saw many of these early surveys listed and business archives placed centre stage by economic historians in the collection of essays. Payne believed that the sources section of the book indicated 'the great wealth of Scotland's business archives'.<sup>3</sup>

In 1977, in a pioneering move, a full-time BACS Surveying Officer was appointed with financial assistance from the Scottish Record Office (SRO). The Scottish Brewing Archive was created in 1982 to provide a historical resource for the brewing industry in Scotland and the Ballast Trust entered the stage in 1988 to support the appraisal and cataloguing of technical records.

During this period the number of record professionals employed to manage the current and archival records of business increased. Several major Scottish companies, such as Bank of Scotland, Royal Bank of Scotland and United Distillers (later known as Diageo), appointed professional archivists. For many collecting repositories this was the heroic age of business archives, where a few dedicated individuals, some archive offices and concerned groups collected all that they could, often working in partnership with liquidators to save records from the skip. Once established, the Ballast Trust frequently supported these efforts by providing temporary storage or full processing of collections. In all these endeavours Scotland benefited from being a relatively small country in which archive and history professionals could work together and reach out to national and local businesses.

In celebrating the thirtieth anniversary, *The Business of Archives: A Labour of Love* explores in detail the circumstances that prompted Bill Lind to establish the Ballast Trust in 1988. Retrospectively it appears inevitable that Bill would address the challenge of managing technical records with his Ballast Trust. However, there were several factors that came together to drive the creation of the Trust. First, there was Bill's longstanding personal passion and vision for industrial history which many other individuals have shared. What made Bill different was the financial resource and full-time commitment to this work that he was able and prepared to provide, a commitment which was shaped by his own work experience and personal circumstances. By the second half of the 1980s, Bill Lind

<sup>2</sup> L. Giffen and R. Hosker, 'Scottish Business Archives: Experience, Influence and Practice', *Business Archives: Principles and Practice*, June 2005, 32.

<sup>3</sup> (ed.) P. L. Payne, *Studies in Scottish Business History* (London, 1967), xiv.

was planning what was to be his third retirement. The first had been retirement from his service with the Territorial Army, the second from his family quarrying and contracting business, and the third from his transport interests with W. H. Malcolm. All his business activities, beginning with an apprenticeship in Lamont's shipyard, had placed him in direct contact with the technology, products and services of Scotland's industries. Throughout his working life from the age of 20 to his mid-50s, he had developed not only a professional competence in these activities, but had acquired a detailed knowledge of their technologies, their machineries and their products. This was what Peter Anderson referred to in his 2008 obituary of Bill as a 'multifarious business background [...] together with an omnivorous interest in all aspects of Scotland's industry – that gave him a unique insight into the records of [Scotland's] industry'.<sup>4</sup> This developed into a personal commitment to secure the survival of the evidence of Scotland's industrial activities, and a determination to preserve for study and understanding the technical business records of Scottish industry.

To achieve this outcome Bill had energy, drive, imagination and resources. The second factor to consider was the challenge of how to provide a framework and put in place working arrangements to give shape to his ambitions. His first steps were to immerse himself in the activities of local technical and historical associations. Hence his Chairmanship of the Renfrewshire Archaeological Society and similarly with the Scottish Society for Industrial Archaeology. From these platforms it was a logical step to join the Business Archive Council of Scotland. It was in that forum that he first met and began to work with Tony Slaven, at that time the Colquhoun Lecturer in Business History at the University of Glasgow and editor of the newsletter of BACS. Bill Lind subsequently became secretary of BACS and organised the merging of its newsletter with that of the Scottish Society for Industrial Archaeology and the Scottish Society for the Preservation of Historical Machinery into the journal *Scottish Industrial History*. Sydney Checkland commented in 1976 on the qualities that Bill brought as secretary to BACS, stating that he 'carries business sense and directness into a situation which might otherwise be over-academic'.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between Tony Slaven and Bill that developed through their work with BACS later became the springboard from which Bill engineered the institutional framework that enabled him to realise his long-held ambition to preserve and promote understanding of, and interest in, technical business archives.

Discussions between Bill and Tony about business history and archives took place between the summers of 1986 and 1987. At that time Tony Slaven held a personal professorship in Business History at the University of Glasgow. Since 1969 he had also been responsible for developing the expanding business archive collection of the Department of Economic History and sharing the interest in that

<sup>4</sup> P. Anderson, 'Obituaries: Dr William Lind (1931–2006)', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 29, 1 (2008), 111–12.

<sup>5</sup> S. G. Checkland, 'Business History in Scotland 1960–76', *Newsletter of the Business Archives Council of Scotland*, 12 (August 1976), 11.

with the University Archives once the University agreed to bring the collection under the care of the Archives in 1975. The outcome of these discussions was to be the creation of a research centre in business history in 1987. This was to be the Centre for Business History in Scotland, the University to receive funding from investments made by Bill Lind to set up a Charitable Trust known as the Aggregate Foundation with a capital of £1.2 million. The University gratefully received the offer, translated Tony Slaven to a new professorial Chair in Business History and appointed him as Director of the new Centre of Business History in Scotland from January 1988. At the same time Bill persuaded the University to accept research income from a second charitable Trust, the Ballast Trust, with a capital of £250,000, this to be a technical business archive project with its activities also to support the Centre for Business History. The choice of names for the Trusts, the Aggregate Foundation and the Ballast Trust, reflect both Bill's background in quarrying and his sense of humour. This arrangement created a symbiotic partnership between the new research centre in business history and the fledgling Ballast Trust, which was to support their respective growth and development through the next three decades.

The final factor was whether there would be an opportunity to deliver a technical records service. Peter Anderson remarked that 'the Ballast Trust came relatively late into the melancholy process of saving the records of Scottish traditional industry',<sup>6</sup> missing as it did the major rescues of the 1960s and 1970s. However, businesses continued to fail and there was still a demand when in 1988 the Ballast Trust was launched immediately into the crisis activity of collaborating with the SRO in helping to rescue the records of the Scott Lithgow empire, as occasioned by the Trafalgar House closure of the yards. Moreover, the parallel takeover of the Govan and Kincaid enterprises by Kvaerner Industries added to the scale of the rescue operation. The service was certainly required and Bill Lind's sure-footed organisational skills soon saw the Ballast Trust operating as the SRO's main partner in sorting and surveying the flood of records rescued and processed in the Joiners' Shop of the Kingston Yard (Plate 1). By the end of 1988 Bill had a clear idea of the remit of the Ballast Trust with a responsibility to deliver a service to business archives and historians but also importantly to the company and creators of the records. In his correspondence at the time he frequently commented on the scale of the job he had undertaken, writing in a letter to Henry Higgs in December that:

Out of this mess, we have to produce order to be able to select, not only that which has to be retained for the Company's use but also the material destined for permanent preservation. Quite clearly this is the biggest job we have ever had to tackle and this is the first time that the task has been undertaken on the firm's premises.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, 'Obituaries: Dr William Lind', 111.

<sup>7</sup> UGD301/1/20/120 The William Lind Collection, Letter from William Lind to Henry Higgs, 19 December 1988.

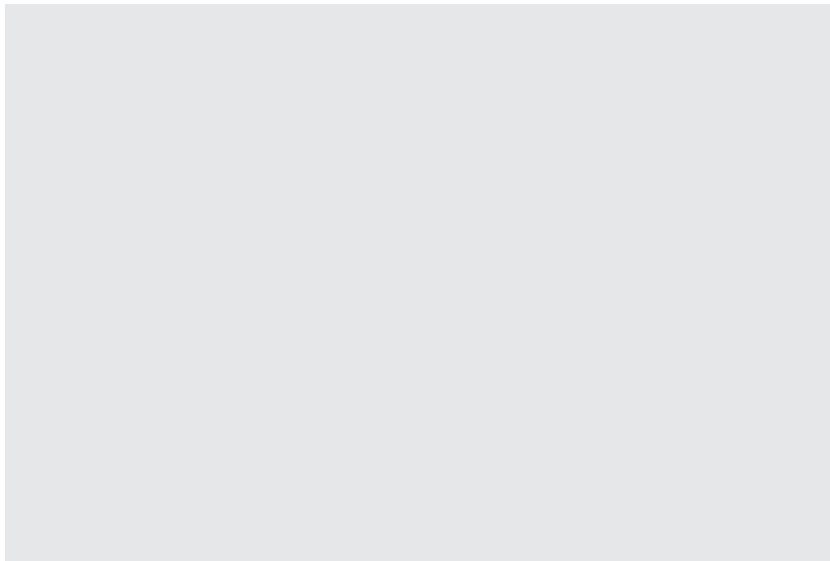


Plate 1 The Ballast Trust's workspace at the Kingston Yard Joiners' Shop in 1989.

This was an enormous task which took nearly four years, as material covering all aspects of the business of shipbuilding was found in offices, attics, warehouses, cellars, loft spaces and even a water tower. The records were brought to the central sorting and processing area in the Joiners' Shop where they were laid out, listed, appraised and catalogued. It was here that the Ballast Trust's working practices were developed, its reputation established and the value and importance of the service it provided became apparent. In later years Andrew Broom, Deputy Keeper of the SRO remarked that: 'If Bill Lind and the Ballast Trust had not undertaken this work to the extent that they have done in recent years, much that has been saved might have been lost or at best neglected for many years.'<sup>8</sup>

By 1992, the Ballast Trust needed to secure its own premises and a move to the Monarch Works in Johnstone occurred. The premises at Walkinshaw Street, an ex-furniture factory of James E. Robertson & Sons Ltd, suited the purposes of the Ballast Trust very well with a large work area and space for processing voluminous technical record collections. This was to be Bill Lind's personal empire for the next fifteen years to 2007, during which time he shaped the Ballast Trust in his personal vision of what was required to identify, list and catalogue technical records, to make them accessible and understandable to everyone.

<sup>8</sup> The William Lind Collection, Correspondence from Andrew M. Broom, Deputy Keeper of the Scottish Record Office, 1991.

This work relied on active partnership with client archives which eventually broadened the scope of the Ballast Trust from its focus on shipbuilding and marine engineering to include a new specialism in the technical records and plans of the locomotive manufacturing industry and British Rail. This was to become the largest component of its work supported by the recruitment of railway enthusiasts to the team of volunteers. While this was a successful development it was not Bill Lind's personal interest, but it was pursued with the same commitment, integrity and attention to detail that characterised all the operations in the Ballast Trust. To some extent Bill's insistence on operating to his own standards did not always sit easily with the requirements of client archives, particularly in his style of rolling plans and persisting in the production of handwritten lists and descriptions at a time when archives increasingly required typed and electronic listings. This was an awkwardness rather than an impasse and it would have been resolved in time, but was abruptly overtaken by Bill's sudden illness and death in October 2007.

This calamity revealed Bill's intention to secure the future of both his personal Ballast Trust and the development of the Centre of Business History in Scotland by leaving the balance of his estate to be divided equally between them. This set in motion the search for a way forward which led to the appointment in 2009 of an archivist, Kiara King, who was to work with Professor Slaven as Director of the Trust to manage the operation at Walkinshaw Street. With the support of the Trustees this involved Kiara in establishing a full survey of the collections held, the adoption of standard accession and processing procedures, together with a progressive move to electronic listing and cataloguing. Externally the existing partnerships with client archives were deepened and extended, and the volunteers and core staff complimented by an infusion of early career archivist placements being introduced to the complexities of dealing with technical business archives.

Under Kiara's tenure the Ballast Trust expanded its engagement with the business archive sector by improving awareness of its services through its online presence and by involving itself in sectoral developments and particularly with the *National Strategy for Business Archives in Scotland*.<sup>9</sup> The closest the Ballast Trust had come to this sort of formal sectoral involvement previously was in 2001 when the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, George MacKenzie, recognised the importance of business records by launching *Elements for a National Policy on Business Archives*.<sup>10</sup> These elements highlighted the role of partnership working and made specific reference to the Ballast Trust alongside BACS of Scotland as key partners for the then National Archives of Scotland (now National Records

<sup>9</sup> K. King, 'A National Strategy for Business Archives in Scotland', *ARC Magazine* (Archives and Records Association), September 2010, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Element 7 of the *Elements for a National Policy on Business Archives for Scotland*, published on the Business Archives Council of Scotland's webpages at <http://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/archives/bacs/publicationsscottishbusinessandindustrialhistory/elementsforanationalpolicyonbusinessarchivesforscotland/>.

of Scotland). The elements codified a series of beliefs and best practice that had evolved within the Scottish archival community and informed business archives management. They emphasised the importance of companies managing their own records where possible and recognised that business archives had particular characteristics and that archivists should be trained to understand them and appraise them.

Building on the framework established by the elements and a business archives strategy for England and Wales in 2009, the archive community launched a *National Strategy for Business Archives in Scotland* in January 2011. It was an initiative that sought to raise awareness among businesses of the value of such archives, to provide guidance and support to all custodians of these collections and to make them more accessible to researchers and the public at large. The Scottish strategy was adapted and developed by the Ballast Trust Archivist, Kiara King and BACS Surveying Officer, David Powell, with Kiara leading on the implementation of the national strategy during its five years of operation as secretary for the group. The long involvement by the Ballast Trust with the national strategy firmly established it as an organisation with an important service to provide for the archives sector in Scotland but also as one with a role to play in the development of that sector.

Much had been achieved when the national strategy was concluded in 2016. It had delivered a crisis management team to rescue business archives at risk, the publication of a range of case studies highlighting the value of business archives, a national awareness campaign, ‘The Working Archive’, managed by the Ballast Trust and involvement in an advocacy event at the Scottish Parliament. Chair of the Implementation Group, Alison Turton reflected in 2016 as the national strategy finished that it had been ‘underpinned by a conviction that the records of Scottish businesses were vitally important and provided crucial commentary not only on Scotland’s economic, political and social development, but also on that of the UK and many countries around the world’.<sup>11</sup> Evidence of this importance can be seen by the appointment during this time of four in-house archivists to companies in Scotland and the post of national Business Archives Surveying Officer, which had earlier fallen victim to funding shortfalls, being re-established by the Ballast Trust in 2014. For most of its history, this post was managed through the work of BACS. Although the two still work in partnership, the role has found a natural home in the Ballast Trust, which today solely funds the post, supported by donations from businesses for archive services rendered. The work of the Ballast Trust is now complemented by the mandate of the Surveying Officer.

Both its involvement in the national strategy and the partnership with the Surveying Officer have significantly shaped how the Ballast Trust works today. The partnership with the Surveying Officer is based on shared aims and in the

<sup>11</sup> A. Turton, ‘Business Archives in Scotland: A Strategy Ends and a Network Begins’, *ARC Magazine*, April 2016, 28–9.

30 years of the Ballast Trust, and before that under Bill's own personal remit, the two bodies worked closely many times on the rescue and processing of records. Joint working on the national strategy has had a lasting impact on the future direction of both organisations. The national strategy firmly embedded the work of the Ballast Trust in the business archives sector and it helped to shape the role of the Surveying Officer by highlighting the value of business archives as an asset. The Surveying Officer has developed from a recorder of business archives to an advisor and champion of business heritage past and present, its unique service continually adapting to meet the changing needs of the businesses it serves.

The Ballast Trust has also adapted, developing from a specialised processing service to becoming not only the leading agency advocating the significance and importance of technical business archives, but also as the home of expertise and training in appraising and cataloguing technical business records. As early as 1990, this aspect of the Trust's work was set out by Michael Moss in his reflections on business records in Scotland when he stated that 'apart from listing technical records directly, the Trust will provide training on this specialised topic'.<sup>12</sup> The ability to provide such training has always been enhanced by the experience, skills and untiring commitment of a regularly renewing band of volunteers. Over the three decades of its existence this work has attracted the service of some 75 volunteers. Initially the volunteers were mainly retired men, many of whom had worked in the great industries of Clydeside and brought their knowledge to the listing, appraisal and description of the technical records being processed. In recent years, they have been complemented by placements of an increasing stream of short-term graduate archivists seeking practical work experience. The value of the work of all our volunteers is appreciated greatly and an essential part of how the Trust works. The knowledge provided by volunteers and methods of working developed by the Ballast Trust around the appraisal and processing of technical records has finally been captured in the form of guidance documents to further share its experience with a wider audience. The core guidance *Understanding Technical Records*, available on the Ballast Trust's website<sup>13</sup> and some information about common drawing types was contributed to *The International Business Archives Handbook*, edited by Alison Turton.<sup>14</sup>

Looking ahead, there are challenges for both the Surveying Officer and the Ballast Trust, particularly in the management of born-digital records and to ensure that records at risk are protected. In terms of collections, the Ballast

<sup>12</sup> M. Moss, 'Business Records in Scotland 1970–1999', *Scottish Industrial History*, 11–13 (1990), 119–27.

<sup>13</sup> *Understanding Technical Records* published by The Ballast Trust in December 2016 and available at <http://ballastrust.org.uk/technical-records/>.

<sup>14</sup> Table 5.2 Architectural drawing types and Table 5.3 Common mechanical engineering drawing types, in (ed.) A. Turton, *The International Business Archives Handbook* (Abingdon, 2017), 133, 136.



Trust has not yet exhausted the supply of industrial business records requiring processing in Scotland. However, it has seen a variation in the type of business records being sent to it with collections from retail, graphic design, marketing and drinks companies being examples of recent accessions. Many of these have come in through the work of the Surveying Officer and with this current partnership, foundations have been laid and the demand recognised for the Ballast Trust and the Surveying Officer to play a key part in delivering their services and shaping the business archives sector in Scotland. The decade since Bill Lind died has witnessed the Ballast Trust being transformed from a small-scale specialised technical records service with limited outreach into a much wider archive service unit. The outcome is that the Ballast Trust is now well integrated with the main archive sector in Scotland and through its comprehensive online presence including a website and Twitter it is becoming increasingly visible. The use of these different channels has raised awareness about the Ballast Trust, providing information on its work and services to a global audience, and given it new ways to engage with users and custodians of business archives.

Throughout 2018 the Ballast Trust celebrated 30 years of understanding technical records with various events and activities. In June the Trust worked in partnership with the Archives and Records Association's Section for Business Records to organise a seminar at the National Railway Museum in York. This seminar focused on technical records held in business archive collections and the different approaches that have been used to reveal their potential. It was heartening to discover much commonality in approaches by organisations such as Transport for London and the National Railway Museum, and the working practices of the Ballast Trust. In August, Kiara delivered a workshop session on technical records at the Archives and Records Association conference in Glasgow and a social media campaign took place all year via Twitter under the hashtag '#Ballast30'. Nearly 300 copies of *The Business of Archives: A Labour of Love* were distributed after the launch with a further mail-out in 2019. The publication is still available to order directly from the Ballast Trust via its website.<sup>15</sup>

These activities and the publication provided the opportunity to reflect on the Ballast Trust's role within the Scottish business archives sector; to document and celebrate its contributions and to recognise the importance of partnerships at the heart of its work. At its thirtieth birthday the trustees, staff and volunteers clearly demonstrated that they have more than met Bill Lind's aspirations for the continuation and development of his Ballast Trust. The way ahead will be challenging but we are confident that the future will be at least as successful as the past achievements.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ballasttrust.org.uk>.