

## Introduction

This book presents the results of a workshop held in Lisbon in May 2006, generously hosted by the Caixa Geral de Depósitos. The workshop was one of a series organized by the European Association for Banking and Financial History (EABH) and, like its predecessors, it was primarily intended for archivists and others responsible for the care of archives in European banks and financial institutions.

The seeds of this particular project were sown at an informal meeting during the EABH's conference in Vienna in May 2005. That small gathering – consisting of archivists active in the EABH and in previous workshops – concluded that the practical benefits of EABH membership should include more overt comparisons between member banks and institutions. In the past EABH conferences and other events have made plentiful comparisons between financial history in different countries and the EABH has also produced overviews of different national traditions of bank archives. However the EABH and its members have been somewhat shy about giving details of the practices and priorities of individual banks and financial institutions. Perhaps this is inevitable in an industry where confidentiality is always given special priority.

Those at the Vienna meeting agreed that there is plenty of scope for inter-bank comparisons in the archives field without compromising the confidentiality of systems and procedures in individual companies. But how would such comparisons be useful? Could they make the archivist's work better known and understood in banks and financial institutions? Here there was consensus that archives units – especially new or understaffed units – would benefit if employers could be shown that other banks and businesses accepted responsibility for their archives and provided for their care and use. As in other areas of modern business, it is a great help if we can point to a competitor and show that that competitor has gained (and certainly not lost) by developing and reinforcing a specialist area such as archives. A decision-maker needs to know that he or she will not be alone in supporting archives and history in business.

This kind of comparison, if it is to carry any weight with executives and managers, must be much more than simple lists of companies which provide archive services. We decided that it would be more useful to ask our members about the dimensions, activities and priorities of their archive units. We should then use their answers to build up a profile of archives in banking and financial services. These profiles would then be available to members of the EABH, both in the published proceedings of a workshop on this topic and through the EABH's website. We envisaged that the profiles of typical, viable archive units could then have practical value to companies who were establishing or extending their archives services – or simply to provide a benchmark for the financial sector.

Information about our members' archives was gathered by questionnaire early in 2006. We felt that these results would be more useful if they were

grouped by type of bank and company, on the grounds that the archival needs of a small private bank, for example, would be very different from those of a major bancassurance concern. The questionnaires were therefore distributed and analysed in four groups: central banks, private banks, national banks and financial services, and multi-national banks and financial services. In this context the term 'national bank' does not refer to state or central banks but to commercial banks which are primarily domestic in their range of operations. They may have important international history and business but (unlike multi-nationals) their main business is in their home countries.

Our questionnaire, reproduced here in the Appendix, was distributed to EABH members by mail and e-mail with only minor variations for the four categories of banks and financial services. We also circulated samples of answers in the hope that the type and quantity of information provided by respondents would be relatively consistent. As could be expected, there was great variation in the number of replies in each category, reflecting the composition of our membership to some extent. Hence the central banks provided 17 responses while the private bank constituency was only five strong. National banks contributed eight replies and multinationals also eight replies. While it would have been interesting to see responses from the entire membership, this total of 38 replies represents 47 per cent of EABH corporate members and it certainly provides sufficient numbers for meaningful comparisons.

The analysis of the four categories of replies was presented at the EABH's workshop 'Banking and Financial Archives: Priorities for the Future' in May 2006. Revised versions of these papers are published in Part I of these proceedings. They offer profiles of archives which we hope will be valuable in arguing the case for archives and in showing that a substantial part of the European banking community enjoys a common range of benefits and advantages from their archive services. The profiles at the end of each chapter also make it possible to contrast the typical characteristics of archives in different types of bank and financial institution. Similarly they enable bench-marking against other sectors and traditions in archives. For example the 'A Census and Educational Needs Survey', funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the USA, questioned over 1000 archives both in public and private sectors on their activities and priorities. The responses and analysis were comparable with our own.<sup>1</sup>

Our workshop in Lisbon went further in its efforts to be of practical value both to established and to new archive units. The answers to all the questionnaires showed that staff and other resources are small and stretched when set beside the range and potential of the activities of an archives unit. There was no

<sup>1</sup> The results of this survey were presented by Gregory S Hunter at the annual general meeting of the Society of American Archivists in New Orleans in August 2005. Tellingly, of all the groups contributing to the survey, business archivists in North America recorded the highest percentage of 'time spent in activities not directly related to archives' – 23 per cent in contrast to 15 per cent for government archivists. See also <http://www.archivists.org/a-census/>

sign of an archives department which was overstaffed but there were plenty of instances where archives work was provided on a shoestring (as for example the 0.25 staff total for one of the national banks<sup>2</sup>). A perpetual challenge to archivists in these situations is to decide upon their priorities, how to juggle the demands of many different tasks and users, and how to develop their knowledge and skills to meet those demands. In Part II of the Lisbon workshop and in these proceedings, we therefore asked three leading professionals to present case studies of archive priorities in banking and financial services. These case studies provide actual examples of priorities in a way which was not possible in the questionnaire results. The case studies also throw light on the archivist's challenges in the immediate future, especially in the management of outsourcing and electronic records.

Delegates and speakers at the Lisbon workshop agreed that our profiles of archives in banking and finance should be progressively updated, not only to include data from other EABH members and from new members but also to keep track of changes in the situation and priorities of existing archives units. The EABH would therefore welcome additional answers to our questionnaire, reinforcing the data which was discussed at the Lisbon workshop. We can then look forward to a future version of the workshop in which a larger number of companies is represented and in which we can return to the question of priorities in this sector of the archives and history community. In the meantime the editors and the EABH warmly thank the entire team of speakers and authors, together with all those who contributed replies to our survey and discussion.

London / Milan, January 2007

Edwin Green and Francesca Pino

<sup>2</sup> See p. 28, Table 1