

Thomas Cook Archives

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ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Report on the
records of

THOMAS COOK GROUP, LTD, travel agents
45 Berkeley St, London W1A 1EB

1990

Note on Access

Access to the Archive is by appointment. Enquiries should be addressed to The Archivist, Thomas Cook Group Ltd, 45 Berkeley Street, London W1A 1EB.

Introduction

Thomas Cook (1808-92), a cabinet maker, Baptist preacher and temperance advocate, arranged excursions in collaboration with the Midland Counties (later Midland) Railway from 1841. From 1854 he devoted himself full-time to travel agency, and began to enter the field of continental travel. The firm changed its name to Thomas Cook and Son in 1871, and in 1878 Thomas Cook resigned the management of the concern in favour of his son John Mason Cook (1834-99). By the 1890s it had grown into an international business, with branches in many countries and a flourishing banking and exchange department. Family control was maintained until the 1920s.

The surviving archive of the firm dates mainly from the years following the opening of its Ludgate Circus headquarters in 1873, but there are considerable gaps due to later destruction and war damage. For Thomas Cook himself there are a few letters and papers, but there is more material documenting the expansion of the firm under John Mason Cook, including correspondence and a series of agreement books. Of considerable value to business and social historians, however, is the large quantity of surviving printed material, beginning with the products of Thomas Cook himself as printer and publicist.

The minute books of the company were not seen, but these may be kept at its present headquarters near Peterborough. The library and archives are housed in the Berkeley Street building that was the previous headquarters, between c1925 and c1975, of Thomas Cook and Son Ltd, and is now the international group headquarters. Minutes and related papers for the period 1943-58, when the company was in public ownership, are now in the Public Record Office (RAIL 1000). The Company was sold back to private enterprise in 1972.

The library and archives were visited on 20 March 1990, and the Commission's thanks are due to the Archivist, Mr E Swinglehurst, and his colleagues for their hospitality on that occasion.

ME ELLIS
RJ OLNEY

May 1990

Summary

Copies of agreements c1875-1927 (11 vols), including leases of premises, agreements with continental railway companies, etc. (The earliest agreements appear to have been transcribed in the early 20th century.)

Correspondence and business papers 1870s-1890s, including letters from Thomas Cook to his wife and to The Times (the latter being copies) relating to his world tour 1872-3, letters from Rudyard Kipling and other clients, letter book of John Mason Cook 1879-83, letter book relating to Cook v Jenkins (a dispute with an American partner) 1883 (with typed copy of proceedings), Cairo office letter book early 1880s, letters from JM Cook to his son Albert in Egypt 1889-93 (1 folder), and personal correspondence of JM Cook c1890-8 (1 folder).

Record book, Boulac yard (near Cairo), relating to the construction of Nile steamers, 1904-17, including copies of inventories.

Travel diaries, including diary of Miss Jemima Morrell 1863 (first excursion to Switzerland by the Junior United Alpine Club) (2 vols), diary of Miss Riggs (first tour to Egypt and the Holy Land) 1869, and diary of a visit to the Victoria Falls 1903.

Subject files from 1860s (in albums or guard books), arranged by country, type of travel, or particular events. Series includes both MS and printed items, including letters, bills and receipts, passports, tickets and labels. Some items are from the archive, others have been given by former employees or clients.

Printed matter c1850 to date, including a run of The Excursionist (from 1903 the Traveller's Gazette) c1851-1939 (indexed), with copies of overseas editions in various languages, handbooks, timetables, guides, brochures (bound volumes mainly from c1895), posters, photographs, films, etc.
