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## Review of The International Business Archives Handbook: Understanding and Managing the Historical Records of Business

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## Review of *The International Business Archives Handbook: Understanding and Managing the Historical Records of Business*

By Alison Turton, ed. New York: Routledge, 2017. 462 pp. Hardcover. \$225.00. ISBN: 978-0-7546-4663-1

Following her own *Managing Business Archives* (1991) and James M. O'Toole's *The Records of American Business* (1997) this new, up-to-date handbook edited by Alison Turton brings together international perspectives on a wide-range of issues relevant to the understanding and management of the historical records of businesses. Turton—former Head of Archives at the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, UK—has managed business archives and researched business heritage for over 30 years. In *The International Business Archives Handbook* she brings together experts to cover business archive and business history initiatives, well-established and emerging issues in the field, and offer practical advice on the management of business records and archives programs.

Overall, *The International Business Archives Handbook* is a valuable resource for anyone working in or with business records and archives. As Turton states “the purpose of this book... is not to provide a complete guide to the subject of managing business archives, but to set out key principles and practices and to signpost useful further reading and online sources of information” (p. xxii). Turton and contributors successfully achieve this goal by both outlining the most relevant and common practices and issues in the field, and including helpful references and reading guides that point to targeted, in-depth coverage of these practices and issues.

The main strength of the handbook is its holistic and accessible approach to business records and archives. The handbook is divided into four parts. Part one begins by placing business archives in context, giving an overview of business history and the development of international business, as well as records creation in offices, focusing on changes in technology over time. Part two moves to describing the nature of business records, both core and industry-specific, giving a better understanding of what an archivist or researcher will encounter when working with business records and archives. Parts one and two lay a solid foundation for the core chapters of the handbook, parts three and four, that address the management and usage of business archives.

Part three is comprised of several chapters that cover the management of business archives from appraisal to access. Appropriately, special attention is given to digital business archives, with chapter ten aiming “to provide advice that should

support the development of a comprehensive, sustainable digital archive system” (p. 317) in a way that can be scaled-down or modified for smaller projects and archives. As expected for a work published in 2017, other chapters are peppered with advice on and examples of digital records and archives.

Part four of *The International Business Archives Handbook* focuses on the use of business archives through the lens of advocacy and outreach, as well as within the business history discipline. This is where perhaps the most notable difference between government and academic archives and their corporate counterparts is highlighted. As chapter twelve author Paul C. Lasewicz notes “...survival is not a given... corporate archivists need to continually justify their existence” (p. 385). As funding for archival and cultural heritage institutions in the United States decreases and survival may no longer be guaranteed, the lessons and advice on advocacy and outreach presented are useful tools for all archivists.

Especially helpful are the case studies and examples included in every chapter, bringing to life the theories and advice discussed in an engaging way. They give the reader the opportunity to focus on the most relevant takeaways from each topic, and spotlight important work and practices. These case studies—plus the use of many explanatory tables, boxes, and figures throughout the handbook—keep the more technical and theoretical ideas and discussions accessible to a broad audience. They nicely balance the overall breadth and generality of the handbook.

Although marketed as international, the handbook is weighted toward the Western—and especially the European—perspective. Turton and contributors do include examples and case studies from across the globe, however most are from developed markets and do not address archives and record keeping practices in emerging economies.

As an archivist working in a private, family archive that holds both personal papers and the records of businesses, I often feel like my work straddles the line between a more traditional archives and a business or corporate archives context. *The International Business Archives Handbook* was helpful to me in understanding key concepts and issues in the world of business records and archives, especially those surrounding advocacy, outreach, and managing risk. I found the sections on reputational and strategic risk in chapter 11 to be particularly insightful, and something that I haven’t seen discussed in-depth in the archival literature or professional forums. Chapter 12, which focuses on advocacy and outreach, encouraged me to challenge and reframe both aspirational and operational goals I have for my own work and the archive I work in.

This handbook is an excellent resource for archivists and archives professionals, business historians, students, and those working in allied professions such as records and information management. It can be taken chapter-by-chapter for those needing a targeted, quick overview of the issue at hand, or as a general overview of business archives for those new or unfamiliar to the field. Extensive references and guides for further reading at the end of each chapter point readers seeking in-depth information

to sources vetted by the editor and contributors, making it a great jumping-off point for anyone interested in learning more about business and corporate archives.

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