

George Backhouse, Chief Executive Officer for the Festival of Britain, papers, 1948 – 1953

Introduction and summary description

Creator George Backhouse
Reference: AAD/1994/9
Extent: 227 files

Context

George Backhouse was employed in 1948 as the Chief Executive Officer of the Festival Office, which was responsible for the personnel and the organisation of the Festival of Britain. The Festival Office was established in 1948 to undertake the organisation and management of official projects connected with the Festival. The head office was at Savoy Court in the Strand, London. Staffing was in part achieved by transfer from the Central Office of Information's Exhibition Unit. George Backhouse employed other staff recruited through the Ministry of Labour. The administrative branches were managed by personnel loaned from other government departments. In addition Backhouse was responsible for the security force for the exhibition, as well as the operational staff and supervisors. At its peak the Office employed 772 core staff, 29 industrial staff and 1,908 operational staff to work on the Festival. Staffing levels dropped rapidly as the exhibition finished. The Festival Office closed in March 1953.

The Festival of Britain was held in 1951 as a celebration of peace and to demonstrate British achievement in the arts, industrial design and the sciences. Although the main site of the Festival was the South Bank, London, it was also promoted as a nationwide event with sites in Belfast, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Festival ship *Campania* visited ports around the country and every town marked the occasion in some way, for example with a music festival or pageant. The exhibition proved to be immensely popular, attracting 8.5 million visitors to the South Bank in five months.

Scope and content

Reports and directives relating to the tour of the exhibition and the opening and closing ceremonies (1949 - 1951); correspondence (1950 - 1951); official photographs of exhibition construction, events, sites and visitors (1950 - 1951); examples of stationery (1951); exhibition catalogues (1951); marshal badges (1951); postcards (1951); press releases (1951); printed ephemera (1951); publications (1951); souvenir newspapers (1951); tickets (1951); guides to districts around Britain (1951 - 1952).

Provenance

Gift of George Backhouse, 1994.

Access

This archive is available for consultation in the V&A Archive and Library Study Room, which is located at Blythe House, 23 Blythe Road, Olympia, London, W14 0QX. The Study Room is open Tuesday to Friday between 10.00 am and 4.30 pm, by appointment only. To request an appointment please email archive@vam.ac.uk or telephone 020 7603 7493. Access to some files may be restricted; these are identified individually with the catalogue.

Related Material

Archive and manuscript sources

See also in the AAD: Central Office of Information, Festival of Britain negatives and photographs (1948 - 1951), Festival of Britain, records (1949 - 1951).

A number of designers, whose papers are held in the National Art Library's Archive of Art and Design, contributed work to the Festival of Britain. See *Guide* index for further details.

Selected publications

Backhouse, George. Organizing the Festival. In: Banham, Mary and Bevis Hillier, eds.

A tonic to the nation: the Festival of Britain, 1951. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976. pp. 161 - 163, ill. ISBN 0500270791.

Detailed catalogue

Newspapers, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/1

Extent: 2 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/1/1	The Times Festival of Britain Supplement	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/1/2	Daily Mail Special Preview of the Festival of Britain - 1951	1951

Journals, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/2

Extent: 3 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/2/1	<i>Design - in the Festival.</i> Council of Industrial Design	1951
AAD/1994/9/2/2	<i>Punch - The Festival.</i> Vol CCXX No 5764	30 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/2/3	A Survey by the Times - come to Britain	Jan 1951

Typescripts, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/3

Extent: 4 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/3/1	'Festival of Britain' - notes, files, cash books and ledgers. Cumulative analysis, outstanding claims and file series 3 sheets	1951
AAD/1994/9/3/2	'David', a British Film Institute release	5 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/3/3	'Telecinema Programme' presented by British Film Institute	30 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/3/4	'The Festival of Britain Telecinema - An adventure in sight and sound.'	30 Apr 1951

Postcards, Undated

Reference: AAD/1994/9/4

Extent: 17 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/4/1	Souvenir postcard - black and white	1951
AAD/1994/9/4/2	North Bank - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/3	Skylon - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/4	Gardens at night - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/5	Neptune - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/6	Neptune - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/7	Power & Production Pavilion - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/8	Nellie - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/9	Nellie - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/10	Campania - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/11	'The People at Home' - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/12	The Fairway - black and white	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/13	Sports Arena - colour	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/14	Fairway and Transport Pavilion - colour	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/15	Royal Festival Hall floodlit - colour	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/16	Seaside - colour	Undated
AAD/1994/9/4/17	Interior of Power and Production Pavilion - colour	Undated

Reports, 1948 - 1953

Reference: AAD/1994/9/5

Extent: 18 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/5/1	Headed stationary for 'Festival of Britain.' 2 pages	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/2	'Report on Organisation & Staffing.' 2 pages	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/3	'Festival of Britain Organisation Chart.'	1 Apr 1949
AAD/1994/9/5/4	'Festival of Britain Organisation Chart.'	1 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/5/5	'Graph of Non-Industrial Staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/6	Graph of exhibition staff.	1948 - 1953
AAD/1994/9/5/7	'Festival Office Administrative, executive and clerical etc. staff.'	1 June 1951
AAD/1994/9/5/8	'South Bank - operational staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/9	'Science Exhibition - Industrial staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/10	'Land Travelling exhibition - Industrial staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/11	F.S. Campania - Industrial staff	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/12	'Architecture exhibition - operational staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/13	'Scottish exhibition - industrial staff.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/14	'Nominal role of non-industrial staff.' 10 pages	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/15	Information on work of main Festival departments	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/16	'South Bank operational staff - rates of pay.'	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/17	'Festival of Britain Office. Honours.' 3 pages	1951
AAD/1994/9/5/18	Letter to the Treasury 8 pages	26 Oct 1950

Correspondence, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/6/1 to AAD/1994/9/6/18

Extent: 18 files

Contains a collection of letters, typescripts and programmes referring to the first visit of the King & Queen.

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/6/1	Invitation and notes on dress code to a dedication service at St. Paul's Cathedral. Contained in envelope addressed to G.E. Backhouse	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/2	Programme for Service of Dedication	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/3	Invitation card to be completed and returned	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/4	Blank invitation card to 'Service of Dedication'	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/5	2 invitation cards for South Bank Exhibition and notes for dress in an envelope addressed to G.E. Backhouse	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/6	South Bank closing ceremony programm. 2 copies	30 Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/7	Thanksgiving service invitation	30 Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/8	Document on the state visit of the King & Queen of Denmark 2 pages	28 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/9	Ceremonial to be observed at 'Service of Dedication.' 2 copies	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/10	Invitation to G.E. Backhouse to meet the Prime Minister	2 May 1950
AAD/1994/9/6/11	Arrangements of reception for King & Queen	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/12	Arrangements for Queen Mary 2 pages	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/13	Programme of the first visit of the King & Queen	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/14	Opening ceremonies - St. Paul's Cathedral 2 pages	3 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/15	Timetable of visit of Royal Party	25 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/16	Arrangements for reception of King & Queen	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/17	South Bank Exhibition map	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/6/18	Arrangements for Royal exhibition tour	4 May 1951

Printed ephemera, 1951 - 1952

Reference: AAD/1994/9/7/1 to AAD/1994/9/7/18

Extent: 18 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/7/1 to	2 'Festival of Britain' sheets printed in an oriental language	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/2		
AAD/1994/9/7/3	'Festival of Britain' Commemorative stamps - 185 2 sheets	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/4	List of Coach Facilities for South Bank Exhibition	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/5	Festival Road Traffic Map 4 copies	1951
AAD/1994/9/7/6	'Festival of Britain' information leaflet	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/7	'Festival of Britain', 1951	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/8	Information summary	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/9	'Fairway Cafe' - menu	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/10	'Regatta Restaurant' - menu	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/11	Invitation to Victoria & Albert Museum	30 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/12	Festival of Britain Christmas card	1951
AAD/1994/9/7/13	Festival of Britain - booklet of events	1951
AAD/1994/9/7/14	'The story of the Festival of Britain.'	1952
AAD/1994/9/7/15	2 bar menus, 1 framed	Undated
AAD/1994/9/7/16 to	Festival information mounted on card	May 1951 - Sept 1951
AAD/1994/9/7/17		
AAD/1994/9/7/18	Commemorative calendar	1951

Plaques & badges, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/8

Extent: 2 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/8/1	Stainless steel plaque 'Festival of Britain Office'	1951
AAD/1994/9/8/2	Brooch & badge for marshall staff, contained in case	ca. 1951

Books, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/9

Extent: 12 items

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/9/1 to AAD/1994/9/9/11	The 'About Britain' series nos. 1-10 and no. 12, published for the 'Festival of Britain' by Collins 11 items	1951

Contains the following documents:

No. 1 - West Country Ref: AAD/1994/9/1	1951
No. 2 - Wessex Ref: AAD/1994/9/2	1951
No. 3 - Home Counties Ref: AAD/1994/9/3	1951
No. 4 - East Anglia Ref: AAD/1994/9/4	1951
No. 5 - Chilterns to Black Country Ref: AAD/1994/9/5	1951
No. 6 - South Wales Ref: AAD/1994/9/6	1951
No. 7 - North Wales Ref: AAD/1994/9/7	1951
No. 8 - East Midlands Ref: AAD/1994/9/8	1951
No. 9 - Lancashire & Yorkshire Ref: AAD/1994/9/9	1951
No. 10 - The Lakes to Tyneside Ref: AAD/1994/9/10	1951
No. 12 - Highlands & Islands of Scotland Ref: AAD/1994/9/11	1951
AAD/1994/9/9/12 'Resurgam' Jarrold & Sons Ltd	Undated

Tickets, 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/10

Extent: 31 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/10/1	‘Admit to the Dome of Discovery’	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/2	Privilege pass - blue	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/3	Press pass no.0040 issued to G.E. Backhouse	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/4	Privilege pass - gold, for G.E. Backhouse	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/5	Red pass for South Bank Exhibition for G.E. Backhouse, includes notes on red passes	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/6	Staff pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/7	Press day pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/8	Catering staff pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/9	Tradesmen staff pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/10	Contractors pass maintenance - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/11	Staff pass - specimen. Representing BBC, Fire Brigade, First Aid, British Railways, LTE, Gas Board, LEB, COID 2 copies	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/12	Staff pass - specimen of the Festival Office Management Section	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/13	Staff pass, no.000078, signed: G.E. Backhouse	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/14	Maintenance contractors day pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/15	Artists staff pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/16	Artists pass	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/17	Official pass for G.E. Backhouse at the ‘Exhibition of Architecture. Poplar.’	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/18	Demonstrators staff pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/19	Guides pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/20	Staff pass - specimen. Blue	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/21	All buildings staff pass for Mr Backhouse no. 000820	1951 Oct 29
AAD/1994/9/10/22	Staff pass for Mr G. Backhouse no. 000451	1 Oct 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/23	All buildings staff pass, signed Mr Backhouse no. 001588	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/24	South Bank visitors day pass for Mr G.E Backhouse. No. 0106	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/25	South Bank visitors day pass for Mr G E Backhouse. No. 0101.	1 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/26	South Bank Visitor's day Pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/27	Royal Festival Hall day pass - specimen	1951
AAD/1994/9/10/28	Press pass - specimen	4 May 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/29	Invitation to Mr G.E. Backhouse to toast the ‘Festival’ from Lady Ismay	30 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/9/10/30	Monthly Season Ticket for South Bank. No 000110	Sept 1951

AAD/1994/9/10/31 Invitation to first visit of the King & Queen at the South Bank Exhibition 4 May 1951
3 copies

Guides, 1951 - 1952

Reference: AAD/1994/9/11

Extent: 14 files

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/11/1	`Festival of Britain, 1951: the South Bank Exhibition buildings', Institution of Civil Engineers	July 1952
AAD/1994/9/11/2	`Pleasure Gardens, Battersea Park'	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/3	`The Festival of Britain, 1951'. With Welsh translation	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/4	Official programme for the `Festival of Britain'	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/5	Festival guide for Northern Ireland	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/6	`Festival of Britain: the autobiography of a nation'. With photographs	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/7	`1951 Exhibition of Architecture'. Poplar	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/8	`1951 Exhibition of Science'. South Kensington.	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/9	Exhibition guide for Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/10	`Festival ship Campania'	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/11	`South Bank Exhibition'. 3 copies. 1 with hard blue cover	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/12	`Exhibition of Industrial Power'. Kelvin Hall, Glasgow 2 copies	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/13	Catalogue of exhibits. Damaged copy	1951
AAD/1994/9/11/14	Festival of Britain Guide to Bury St. Edmunds	May 1951 - Sept 1951

Photographs, 1949 - 1951

Reference: AAD/1994/9/12/1 to AAD/1994/9/12/88

Extent: 88 items

Reference	Description	Dates
AAD/1994/9/12/1	Album containing 50 photographs in black & white. Pictures include building work through to completion, shots of exhibits and visits of the Royal Family	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/12/2 to AAD/1994/9/12/74	All British Official Photographs - all black & white. 73 items	1949 - 1951

Contains the following documents:

`The White Knight in the Lion & Unicorn Exhibition.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/2	8 June 1951
`A Display of Cacti.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/3	8 June 1951
`South Bank Exhibition.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/4	20 May 1950
`Exhibition of live architecture' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/5	21 June 1950
Avenue leading through Sport Pavilion. Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/6	20 June 1950
Transport Pavilion Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/7	5 Feb 1951
View of Platt Hall Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/8	12 Oct 1949
The '51 Bar at South Bank Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/9	15 June 1951
A Country Spinning Wheel Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/10	8 June 1951
`Living room of the People at Home' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/11	11 May 1951
View from Hungerford Bridge Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/12	23 Oct 1950

Exhibition of Live Architecture Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/13	21 June 1950
Buddicom Locomotive Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/14	Undated
Charles Darwin Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/15	19 July 1951
Progress Picture - 'Shot Tower' & 'Royal Festival Hall' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/16	23 Oct 1950
Loch Sloy Power Station (model) Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/17	29 May 1951
Construction work Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/18	16 Feb 1951
'Tree Transportation.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/19	17 Oct 1950
'Campania.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/20	13 July 1951
Building with Waterloo Bridge gate entrance Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/21	23 Apr 1951
'Oil Circuit Breaker.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/22	20 Mar 1951
'Vertical Feature.' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/23	5 May 1950
Trinity Congregational Church Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/24	31 May 1951
Nelson Pier Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/25	14 Aug 1951
'Campania' Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/26	26 June 1951
South Bank Progress Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/27	14 Nov 1950

Construction work on South Bank Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/28	10 July 1950
River Walk Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/29	26 May 1951
Battersea Park Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/30	19 Oct 1949
Sea and Ships Pavilion Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/31	26 May 1951
Commemorative plaque of Silent Peel, 1868 Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/32	22 Sept 1950
Information room Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/33	22 June 1949
‘Skylon’ - construction Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/34	6 Mar 1951
Gymnastic display Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/35	1 June 1951
Pleasure Gardens Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/36	18 Oct 1950
‘Telekinesia’ Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/37	27 June 1951
View from river Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/38	Undated
Lion Brewery Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/39	12 Dec 1948
Dome & Discovery Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/40	23 May 1950
Market Place Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/41	23 May 1951
Exhibition Model Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/42	20 May 1951

Exhibition Model	20 May
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/43	1950
Church Service	26 Apr
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/44	1951
Bus Tour	30 Oct
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/45	1950
Party of Commonwealth Press representatives	25 Oct
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/46	1950
Royal Visit to Poplar	9 Nov
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/47	1950
Captain F.S. Thornton O.B.E	3 May
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/48	1951
Royal visit to Poplar	9 Nov
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/49	1950
Royal visit to Poplar	9 Nov
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/50	1950
Royal visit to Poplar	9 Nov
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/51	1950
German journalists at Thames Bank	21 Apr
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/52	1950
Exhibition of Science	11 May
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/53	1951
European Publicity Bus Tour	28 Oct
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/54	1950
Royal visit	4 May
3 copies, ref: AAD/1994/9/12/55	1951
Royal visit to Architecture exhibition	9 Nov
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/56 to AAD/1994/9/12/58	1950
Visit to Thames Bank	4 May
Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/59	1950

Visit to Thames Bank Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/60	4 May 1950
Press conference Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/61	9 Jan 1951
European bus tour Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/62	25 July 1950
Royal visit to Festival of Britain office Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/63	2 May 1950
Campania - Lord Nelson's bar Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/64	26 June 1951
Festival documentary film Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/65	15 May 1950
‘Buddicom’ Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/66	12 Jan 1951
European bus tour Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/67	25 July 1950
Thames Bank progress Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/68	7 Aug 1949
Roman Catholic School - Poplar Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/69	11 Nov 1950
Map of South Bank Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/70	Undated
‘Red Lion Brewery’ by Frances Macdonald Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/71	12 June 1950
‘Red Lion Brewery’ by W. Fairclough Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/72	12 June 1950
South Front of Exhibition Building, 1851 Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/73	Undated
‘The West Nave,’ 1851 Ref: AAD/1994/9/12/74	Undated

AAD/1994/9/12/75	Aerial view of Festival	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/76	View of Festival buildings	ca. 1951
AAD/1994/9/12/77	City view	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/78	Progress picture	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/79	Construction work	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/80	Construction work	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/81	Uncompleted building	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/82	Construction vehicles	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/83	Front of Science building	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/84	Lion statue under construction	Undated
AAD/1994/9/12/85	Building roads and pavements	Undated
AAD/1994/12/86	Poster size, South Bank	23 Apr 1951
AAD/1994/12/87	Poster size, Dome of Discovery	10 June 1951
AAD/1994/9/12/88	Poster size, Royal Festival Hall, interior	ca. 1951
