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Company records of Achille Serre Ltd, industrial dry cleaners

Donated by Mrs F.M.L.Fitzwilliam, wife of the former company chairman, 1976

The origins of the Company were in France, where Monsieur Achille Serre, a dry dryer of silks at Sannois, founded a small business on the outskirts of Paris before 1870. As a result of the Franco - Prussian War. Monsieur Serre and his wife left for England and settled in Dalston, where Serre built a small workshop, working as a ribbon dyer and waterer. As a result of a decline in his trade he introduced the practice of 'Nettoyage a Sec' into England - borrowed from the business of a friend in France. Serre is credited with being the first dry cleaner in England. His first business premises were in a portion of Griffith's Tar Yard at Hackney Wick; subsequently he opened an office on the first floor of No 68 Cheapside in the City and a shop at No 5 Queen Street, City, soon afterwards. His son Eugene took over the management of the business in 1886, bringing his brother - in - laws, W.S. and J.B.Argent into the business.

The business became a limited Company in 1906. Its factory site in Hackney Wick was rebuilt, but was too small to cope with the growth in business and two additional factories were acquired in the immediate vicinity. In 1929 the Company acquired the Walthamstow site, in the former grounds of 'Uplands', Blackhorse Lane (the house serving as a sports club and library, until World War II). The depression affected the firm badly, and portions of the Walthamstow site were sold off - all previous sites having been disposed of following the move from Hackney. The Company went into Receivership in 1939, which lasted to 1943, at which stage the Company was reconstructed and portions of the premises previously leased to the Mills Equipment Company were sold to Boake Roberts of Stratford.

In the 1950s and 1960s distant retail outlets in Glasgow, Manchester and Scarborough were closed. Finally in 1968 the Company was taken over by Great Portlands Estates. In December 1969 the Company was sold to Sketchleys of Romford, who closed the factory in January 1970. The residue of the premises were taken over by James Hayes & Sons in March 1971.

Company accounts and organisation

		Sub	Acc
1. Reports of directors and statements of account. 23 printed pamphlets. 1 bundle.	1943 - 1966		1
2. File of articles of association etc. Includes two copies of articles of association of Company in 1906, and the papers of F.M.L.Fitzwilliam, Receiver & Manager, which give accounts and reports of the period of Receivership and reports to the debenture holders etc and address to company employees August 1940. File also includes cuttings concerning the revival to 1945. 1 file	1906 - 1945		2

Price lists

3. Ladies price list, 1929. Typescript lists for costs of dry cleaning women and children's clothes. Includes dyeing 1 item	1929		3
4. Price list for household furnishings, 1929. As above, includes dyeing. 2 copies.	1929		4
5. Minimum retail price list, October 1929. For male and female clothing and household goods. Printed, with typescript revision of prices at front to 1931. 2 items	1929 - 1931		5

Company records of Achille Serre .....

Sub Acc

Price lists

- |    |   |               |   |
|----|---|---------------|---|
| 6. | Instruction manual and price list. Folder including copies of circulars to branches on prices and working instructions. At front are quarterly summary of orders. | c 1961 - 1964 | 6 |
|----|---|---------------|---|

Staff Manuals and trade catalogues

- |     |   |                          |    |
|-----|---|--------------------------|----|
| 7.  | 'About your firm'. Pamphlet issued to employees by the Company, giving details of conditions of employment and the various Company funds. n.d. but before 1927.   | pre 1927                 | 7, |
| 8.  | 'Manual and handbook for the guidance of Manageresses' Gives details of branch routine, counter practice and workroom operation, dyeing and cleaning and book keeping. Three numbered copies, one annotated. n.d. but issued after 1923 and before 1927. The annotated copy has a small booklet inside it entitled 'Just like new!', which gives cleaning prices c 1930s. | 1923 - 1927<br>& c 1930s | 8  |
| 9.  | 'Instruction book issued for the assistance of 'Trade' Customers sending orders for cleaning or dyeing to Achille Serre Ltd'. Pamphlet issued 1925  | 1925                     | 9  |
| 10. | 'Notes on cleaning and dyeing by Achille Serre Ltd' Catalogue giving a list of branches, general information, prices and application for a ledger account. n.d. c 1920s ?   | c 1920s                  | 10 |
| 11  | 'Notes on cleaning and dyeing and renovation of ladies and children's garments... by Achille Serre' Catalogue as above. Most prices are the same as (10) but one or two price changes would suggest that this is slightly earlier than (10). n.d. Cover illustration of art nouveau lady.   | c 1910:                  | 11 |

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Publicity material and brochures

- |     |   |        |     |
|-----|---|--------|-----|
| 12. | 'The care we take with your cleaning! an illustrated tour of the Achille Serre Works'. Small pamphlet, issued c 1955 - though photographs may be just post war.                 | c 1955 | 12  |
| 13. | 'The way to smartness: a tour of the works with glimpses of the many Craftsmen specialists whose motto is 'Achille Serre for extra care' . Pamphlet issued January 1960.        | 1960   | 13. |
| 14. | Achille Serre works tour. July 1962. Three copies in English, one in French and one in German. Brief description of each room. Plan of works and route of tour at back. 5 items | 1962   | 14  |

Cuttings, including the Company's own advertising material

- |     |  |             |    |
|-----|--|-------------|----|
| 15. | 'Propaganda letters' 1922 - 1929. Includes letters with stamped addresses of branches. Index at front. 1 vol   | 1922 - 1929 | 15 |
| 16. | Cuttings 1928 - 1933. Includes articles, some of which are illustrated by photographs of the Hackney and Walthamstow factories. Vol may have been started by J. Bernard Argent Index at front. 1 vol | 1928 - 1933 | 16 |

Company records of Achille Serre ....

Sub Acc

Cuttings .... (cont'd)

- |   |             |    |       |
|---|-------------|----|-------|
| 17. Cuttings of social events, including programmes of annual dinners from 1912, to 1935 (the programme for 1926 is also a company history) and production programmes of the Achille Serre Social and Athletic Association. Collected by J.B.Argent ? | 1912 - 1935 | 17 | 1 vol |
| 18. Cuttings of Company advertisements, June 1945 -<br>- c November 1963. 1 vol (ring binder)   | 1945 - 1963 | 18 |       |
| 19. Advertisements, leaflets and promotions, c 1946<br>- c 1968. Includes copy of the Gentlewomen with an advert for the Company on the front page, (issue 30 September 1893).  | 1946 - 1968 | 19 | 1 vol |
| 20. Cuttings 1954 - 1959. Includes two loose undated photographs at front of factory premises with line of vans and drivers (c 1920s) <sup>①</sup> and view of vans and drivers lined up along a road (c 1920s) <sup>②</sup> .                        | 1954 - 1959 | 20 | 1 vol |
| 21. Cuttings 1960 - 65. At front are loose cuttings (now in envelopes) 1966 - 68 concerned with the price restriction of 1966 and on the takeover of the Company by Great Portlands Estates in 1968.  | 1960 - 1968 | 21 | 1 vol |

Articles, company histories and miscellaneous

- |  |             |    |        |
|--|-------------|----|--------|
| 22. File containing the following: 'Proposed layout of new factory for Messrs Achille Serre Ltd' by T.J.Codd, August 1927. Scale: 60' to 1". Shows plan of Walthamstow premises; copies of the menus of works dinners 1928 - 34 and 1945; another copy of 'About your firm' ((7) above); offprint of article on the visit of the Duke of York to the Walthamstow factory, 1931; notice to office staff re Receivership, 1940; copy of Evening News for 4 April 1924 with report of Company meeting; 23rd annual report of the Company, 1929; misc. cuttings and boards used in the Receivership hearing, 1940. | 1924 - 1945 | 22 | 1 file |
| 23. 'A survey of works conditions with a few suggestions by W.S.Argent' Dated 10 October 1929. Includes analysis of profits / loss and the differences in costs between the Hackney and Walthamstow factories. With annotations.   | 1929        | 23 | 1 item |
| 24. 'Our past history and a survey of our present position' by J.Bernard Argent. n.d. but c 1929, written after author had read (23). Discusses costing, the issue of further debentures, branch profits, work quality and the Walthamstow factory.  | c 1929      | 24 | 1 item |

① Carpenters Road works Hackney, pos 1926-7.

② c 1926-27

Company records of Achille Serre .....Articles, company histories and miscellaneous

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|-----|---|-------------|----|
| 25. | <p>'Historical file' Contained the following:<br/>         Another copy of 'About your firm'; copy of article from 'The Lady' for 27 November 1947 '£15,000,000 a year to keep clean' on the Company; cutting from the Sunday Despatch 29 May 1949 on the Company; two copies of 'The Better Way', August and September 1948 with brief biography of Achille Serre; copy of Evening News 4 April 1924 with report of Achille Serre annual dinner; 'One of the finest dry-cleaning plants in the world: Messrs Achille Serre's works at Walthamstow', reprint from the Power Laundry 7 March 1931; another copy of the article on the Duke of York's visit to the factory, 1931; copy of programme of annual dinner 1927 and song sheet, including words of company song; 'Romance in Commerce: a page of industrial history', circular issued to help raise share capital c 1924; 'In Fifty Years, some notes on the remarkable progress of Achille Serre', the Jubilee publication, 1927 which includes some of the prints from the album series of social events factory views, transport and shop fronts.(2 copies); Another chapter', booklet published c 1929 about the Walthamstow factory, with photographs; 'A memorable occasion, 9 April 1926' (another copy of item mentioned in (17)); 'What we do', illustrated handout with illustrations of inside the works and of models to give examples of clothes cleaned, with separate price list, n.d. but c 1930s; 'A brief history of the origin and growth of the Achille Serre Organisation' dated 20 February 1962 by F.H.L.Pitzwilliam (typescript); 'Trading and branches; possibly by W.S.Argent written late in 1937, which discusses branch closure, prices, redundancies, trade services, competition and advertising, also subsidiary companies, typescript; 'Analysis of work 1899 - 1900'. mss giving branch turnovers month by month.</p> | 1899 - 1962 | 25 |
| 26. | <p>'One of the finest dry-cleaning plants in the world' 13 extra copies of Power Laundry article of 1931.<br/>1 bundle</p>  | 1931        | 26 |
| 27. | <p>'Duke of York visits Achille Serre'. Another copy of 1931 article.<br/>1 item</p>  | 1931        | 27 |
| 28. | <p>'Achille Serre Ltd' Reprint from Investors Chronicle 4 October 1957 concerning modernisation at the Walthamstow factory and changes in shop fronts. 2 copies</p>   | 1957        | 28 |
| 29. | <p>'Hail and farewell' Cutting dated 11 February 1938 concerning A.W.Newell, S.B.Taylor and the secretaryship of the Achille Serre Sports and Social Club. 1 item</p>   | 1938        | 29 |
| 30. | <p>'Achille Serre for extra care' Typescript note by Hilton Bowden on the making of a 16mm publicity film. Dated 2 October 1963.<br/>1 item</p>   | 1963        | 30 |
| 31. | <p>Autograph book of the signatures of the Area Managers signed at an area meeting at the Criterion Restaurant Piccadilly, 5 January 1955.<br/>1 vol</p>  | 1955        | 31 |

Company records of Achille Serre .....

Sub Acc

Articles, company histories and miscellaneous

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|--|-------------|----|
| 32. Certificate presented to Francis M.L. Fitzwilliams to commemorate 25 years of service with Achille Serre 9 December 1965, 1 item   | 1965        | 32 |
| 33 'A veteran looks back': the memoirs of James Robinson Peers recorded by Joan Robertson. Reprinted from the Dry Cleaning Journal, c 1945. Peers worked in Norwood and was not directly connected with Achille Serre 1 item | c1945       | 33 |
| 34. 'One hundred years 1852 - 1952, Scotts of Dover'. Company history. No connection with Achille Serre  | 1952        | 34 |
| 35. Varsity Conference of Cleaners. Programmes of annual conferences held in various venues in the U.S.A. 1952 - 1963. 21 items  | 1952 - 1963 | 35 |

Books and Company magazineNote These items are on the open shelves in the Search Room

- |   |             |    |
|---|-------------|----|
| 'The Drum, a quarterly magazine issued by Achille Serre Ltd' January 1920 - July 1929. Incomplete - missing Vol 1 No 4, Vol 2, Vol 3 Nos 1 & 3, Vol 5, Nos 1 - 2 and 4; No issues after Vol 8 No 1. 1 vol   | 1920 - 1929 | 36 |
| 'The Impending revolution in dry-cleaning: an outline of the vast changes in costs and quality brought about by the new Hatfield Process and its compliment, the Serre Vacuum Washer.' Published by Serre-Alliott Associated Patents Ltd (address Achille Serre Walthamstow factory), n.d. but c 1938 ? Includes photographs of the machinery installed in the Walthamstow works. 1 vol | c 1938 ?    | 37 |

Photographs and photograph albums

- |   |                        |    |
|---|------------------------|----|
| 36. Works album. Includes the Griffith Far Yard premises, Carpenters Road, c 1886, staff outing 1891, football team 1907 - 08, interior views of factory with staff at work, details of equipment, group portraits etc. 1 vol   | 1886 - 1925            | 38 |
| 37. Walthamstow works, 1929. Includes exteriors, internal premises, including display studio and staff groups. All interior photographs include staff in work positions. Loose at front is another copy of 'In Fifty Years', 'Winter Toilets', a price list with an illustrated front cover (printing code suggests a date of October 1913). Also photographs of the works c 1959 and 1968, and cutting of an undated advertisement which may be c 1880s. 1 vol | 1929<br>(1880s - 1968) | 39 |
| 38. Visit of the Duke of York to the Walthamstow works, 1931. With inside and outside views. 1 vol  | 1931                   | 40 |

Company records of Achille Serre ;...Photographs and photograph albums

Sub Acc

39.	Social album: annual outing and sports, High Beech September 1919. Includes races, competitions, fancy dress evening etc.	1 vol	1919	41
40.	Social album: Sports meeting held at Walthamstow, 30 June 1928. Stalls, races, competitions etc	1 vol	1928	42
41.	Social album. Works sports 20 July 1929. Includes Hockey team and dramatic productions		1929 - 1932	43
42.	Social album. Sports meeting held at Salisbury Hall 11 September 1926. At front photograph from an amateur dramatic production, 1932	1 vol	1926 & 1932	44
43.	Social album: dramatic productions and childrens' parties 1933 to c 1939.	1 vol	1933 - c 1939	45
44.	Album. Includes group outside Hackney premises Christmas party, 1939, and views showing war work, including the manufacture of sandbags etc.	1 vol	c 1890s, c 1939 - 40	46
45.	Social album. Presentations to staff, 1953 - 1958.	1 vol	1953 - c 1958	47
46.	Social album. Presentations to staff 1959 - 1965.	1 vol	1959 - 1965	48
47.	Photographic files. Include files on company history, operatives in action, branch exteriors and interiors, the Walthamstow exhibition, personal visits equipment and the laboratory.	2 boxes	c 1957 - 1968	49

Listed August 1982  
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