

Explore
500 years
of world history



The historical library collection of
the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

The FCO Historical Collection

What is it?

The historical library collection of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) comprises over 80,000 items – books, periodicals and pamphlets, as well as manuscript, typescript and photographic material – spanning 500 years of history and covering all parts of the world. Many items in the collection are extremely rare; some are unique. Transferred to King's College London in 2007, this magnificent collection provides a superlative resource for the historian, offering a wealth of opportunities for teaching and research.

For most of its long and complex history the FCO Historical Collection was a working tool of government, its contents handled and often annotated by government officials and used to inform and influence British foreign and colonial policy. Visible evidence of its unique provenance thus lends additional value to what its contents can teach us.

Major subject strengths of the collection include:

- exploration and discovery
- war and cold war
- diplomacy and peace-keeping
- the growth, rule and decline of empires
- colonial emigration and settlement
- the growth and abolition of the Atlantic slave trade
- the creation of the Commonwealth
- trade, transport and communication
- anthropology and natural history.

The most important library collection to be acquired by King's to date, the FCO Historical Collection is not only a prime resource for scholarship but a true reflection of London's diverse inheritance, containing something of everyone's history within its pages.

Where is it?

Most of the FCO Historical Collection is housed in the Foyle Special Collections Library, where it is being sorted, catalogued and made available for consultation.

Some of the 20th and 21st century material, however, does not form part of the historical collection and is available in the Maughan Library, where it now forms part of the main loanable collection. For visitor consultation arrangements for this material please see our web pages at www.kcl.ac.uk/library



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THE FCO: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

ca1640	1660	1768	1782	1801
Northern and Southern Departments formed to look after England's relations with the countries of northern and southern Europe, respectively	Council of Foreign Plantations formed	Council of Foreign Plantations becomes Council for Trade and Plantations	Foreign Office formed	Secretary of State for War assumes responsibility for the Colonies

Can anyone consult the FCO Historical Collection?

Yes – though if you are not a member of King's, we prefer you to make an appointment in advance of your visit. We will ask you to provide proof of identity when you arrive. For full details of the Foyle Special Collections Library's opening times, travel directions and consultation procedures, see www.kcl.ac.uk/specialcollections

Can I borrow items?

No – the FCO Historical Collection is a reference collection.

Photocopies or digital copies can, however, be supplied and readers are permitted to take their own photographs of items, subject to preservation and copyright considerations.

How can I find out more?

You can find out more about the FCO Historical Collection on our web pages, where a collection guide, in-depth articles on individual items and online exhibitions explore the riches of this vast collection.

We also run a programme of free public exhibitions in the Maughan Library, many of which feature items from the collection. Please visit www.kcl.ac.uk/specialcollections to find out more.

Catalogues and enquiries

You can search the King's library catalogue <http://library.kcl.ac.uk> for items from the collection. Either limit your search to find items from the FCO Historical Collection only or choose to explore all our different library collections in a single search.

Please note that much of the FCO Historical Collection remains to be catalogued. The Special Collections team welcomes enquiries about the subject coverage of the FCO Historical Collection and will locate and make available material in advance of cataloguing, given reasonable notice.

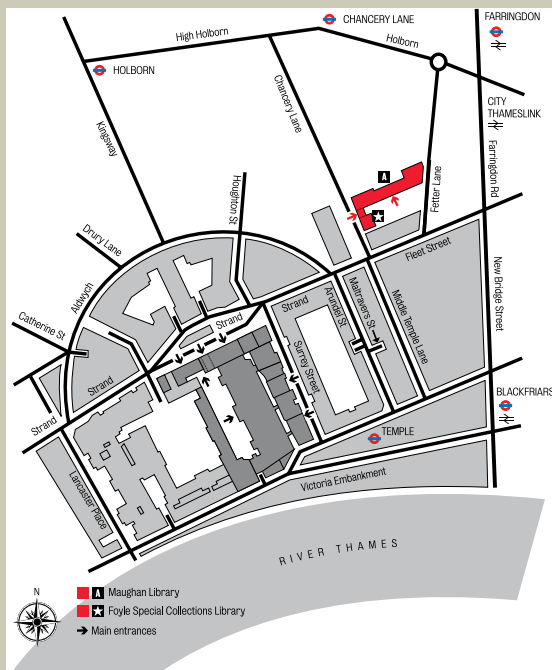
If you are interested in organising a visit for a group or a student seminar incorporating material from the FCO Historical Collection, we would be delighted to hear from you.



1854	1858	1925	1947	1966	1968
Colonial Office formed as a separate government department	Responsibility for India passes from the East India Company to the newly formed India Office	Dominions Office formed to look after British relations with Australia, Canada, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa	Dominions Office and India Office merge to form the Commonwealth Relations Office	Colonial Office absorbed by Commonwealth Relations Office, which becomes Commonwealth Office	Commonwealth Office merges with the Foreign Office, to form the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

Support our Special Collections

Much of this unique and internationally important collection awaits cataloguing and conservation treatment. You can help us by making a gift to support this vital work, which will make the riches of the collection available to all. For more information please contact: giving@kcl.ac.uk



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Ownership and governance of the FCO Historical Collection
Title to the collection is vested in a company limited by guarantee which is wholly owned by King's College London. A board of trustees, four of whom are appointed by the Foreign Secretary and four by the College Principal, oversees the management of the

collection, specifically to ensure that the terms of the transfer agreement between the FCO and King's College London are met. These include the maintenance of the collection for broad public benefit. King's College London is a charity exempt from registration under section 2 of the Charities Act.