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The Foreign Office and Official History: Historiography, Methods and People

Gaynor Johnson

University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the absence of an official history of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), despite its significant role in British political life and international representation. It highlights the challenges of documenting the complex administrative history of the FCDO, which has existed in various forms since 1782. The task is daunting due to the vast historical records and the potential lack of objectivity from 'in-house' historians, who are busy with editorial and advisory work. Previous attempts by insiders to write the history were often defensive, aiming to justify the current professional culture. These efforts were made during times when the Civil Service faced pressure to prove its relevance amidst social and cultural changes post-World Wars. The article suggests focusing on specific periods, like the World Wars, to make the history more engaging. It also proposes incorporating human stories to enliven the narrative and conducting prosopographic studies of Foreign Office clerks and officials alongside a traditional administrative history.

Apart from 10 Downing Street, and the Palace of Westminster, the building occupied by what is currently the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is one of the most instantly recognisable in Whitehall. Its imposing presence overlooking St James's Park, the famous Clive Steps, its northern wing adjacent to Downing Street, and, most of all, the eastern wing forming the backdrop to the annual remembrance ceremonies at the Cenotaph on Whitehall itself, place it literally at the heart of British national life. And there are few more important branches of government activity than the promotion and representation of British power and influence overseas. However, comparatively little has been written about the history of what, for the purposes of this article, will be referred to simply as the Foreign Office. The oldest studies appear to have a political agenda of their own and are not rooted in detailed historical research; later studies, while more academically rigorous, offer only a partial insight into its operation and professional culture. Likewise, there is no official history of the Foreign Office, although the possibility of commissioning one has been considered on several occasions. Of

CONTACT Gaynor Johnson G.L.Johnson@kent.ac.uk

course, the Foreign Office is not unique in this respect; the other two 'great' offices of state, the Home Office and the Treasury, are similarly lacking in this kind of historical attention. One of the purposes of this article is to consider why, despite the unabating interest of scholars in British foreign policy, no one has been willing to take on the task of writing a history of the Foreign Office itself, whether official or not. It will also consider what forms that history could take should it be written.

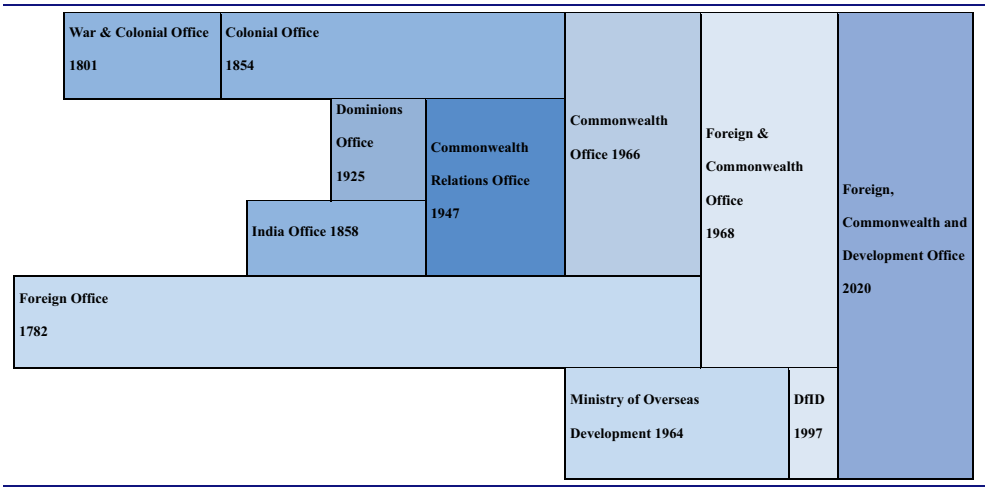
The first attempt to create a government department whose sole responsibility was the management of Britain's presence abroad was in 1782 by the Marquess of Rockingham, with Charles James Fox as the first Foreign Secretary. Until the seventeenth century, the conduct of British foreign policy had been primarily the province of the monarch and a small entourage of favoured politicians and members of the military. The Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, saw the creation of the Northern and Southern Departments. Despite the implication in their names, their remit was not to divide government business into two distinct geographical regions. Nor was the structure intended to reflect the earth's two hemispheres. With the exception of Britain's overseas possessions, few conceived British foreign policy on a global scale, and most world views extended little beyond the geographical confines of Europe. Likewise, the Northern and Southern Departments were not merely concerned with foreign affairs but dealt also with domestic issues and a variety of commercial and legal issues. Consequently, historians of government can trace the origins not only of the Foreign Office from these developments but also those of the Home Office. This arrangement necessarily blurred the division between the foreign and the domestic in politics; one that was destined to become more marked and important over time.

Discussing what exactly we mean by the foreign and thus the remit of the Foreign Office has other significances to those in quest of an official history. The term 'Foreign Office' has become a convenient shorthand for scholars, the media and politicians alike that is still widely in use. But to be strictly accurate, it was the proper name for the government department only between 1782 and 1968. While that time frame accounts for most of its existence, one must ask whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) that subsumed it and which lasted until September 2020 should be viewed as a different historical and administrative entity. Still more the question needs to be asked about the emergence of its current iteration, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) that resulted from the merger of the FCO and the Department for International Development on that date. In terms of the writing of official history, one could therefore make the case for there having been three 'Foreign Offices', each with its own name and remit. An illustration of how important it is to consider this arrangement for the division of work and material is the aims of the FCO, as stated in 2020.[1] They were: safeguarding the UK's national security by countering terrorism and weapons proliferation and working to reduce conflict; building the UK's prosperity by

increasing exports and investment, opening markets, ensuring access to resources, and promoting sustainable global growth; and supporting British nationals around the world through modern and efficient consular services. Since the creation of the FCDO, the aims have been even more general: 'We lead the UK's diplomatic development and consular work around the world'.[2] The FCDO also has responsibility for the administration of British territories overseas, although their number continues to fall. It could be argued that dividing up the task of writing an official history of what could be termed Britain's interactions with the world thus has a logic that extends beyond simply making the task more manageable. Such an approach would also resonate with how other official histories have been conceived. It would have been too complex and onerous a task, for example, to write a collective official history of the British security services, although those that relate simply to MI5 and to MI6 have been very well received.

However, this three-history approach is not without its pitfalls, not least because it would not cover the history of all the departments that can be regarded as predecessors of the modern FCDO in one way or other. These include, above all, the various bodies responsible for the administration of the British Empire. The following diagram illustrates the complexity of the FCDO's inheritance:[3]

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and predecessor departments since 1782.



While there remains no official history of what for convenience's sake will be referred to as the Foreign Office, there have, of course, been attempts to write its history. A number cover the period before 1968, mostly written by 'insiders', often as a result of some perceived need to record the *status quo* for posterity. Several, however, display the characteristics of official histories in that they were intended to be authoritative, readable and instructive. One

could therefore debate whether any of the books discussed below might be considered 'accidental' or 'coincidental' official histories.

Perhaps the earliest, and still one of the best, is Algernon Cecil's contribution to *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy*.[4] However, the best known is probably *The Foreign Office*, published in 1933 and co-authored by the diplomat, Sir John Tilley[5] and Sir Stephen Gaselee, the long-time Foreign Office librarian.[6] Tilley (1869–1952) was the son of a civil servant. He entered the Diplomatic Service in 1890 and was married to the daughter of a diplomat. His credentials as an historian of the Foreign Office stemmed from his period as Chief Clerk, 1913–1918, although the culmination of his diplomatic career has generally been seen to be his stint as Ambassador to Japan, 1926–1931.[7] Gaselee (1882–1943) was half a generation younger than Tilley, although they shared a common background as alumni of Eton and King's College Cambridge. Gaselee's forebears were academics and lawyers. Unmarried and a well-known eccentric, he was a life-long bibliophile, having been Pepys Librarian at Magdalene College, Cambridge before entering the Foreign Office. He became Foreign Office Librarian in 1920, a post he held until his death. A biographer described him as being 'a dilletante in the best sense' and 'strikingly more than his career or his literary output'.[8] His formidable mind, combined with an unrivalled knowledge of the Foreign Office's library and document collections, ensured that his reputation extended well beyond the confines of the Librarian's Department.

Tilley and Gaselee were an unlikely combination, and there is little evidence to suggest that they actually collaborated with each other. Their personalities and professional perspectives were widely different. While, to an extent, that is the point – they offered contrasting views of the history and working life of the Foreign Office – it does little to give the finished book much of a sense of coherence. That said, in many respects, the book is wonderful mine of gossipy historical and anecdotal information about the Foreign Office and those who worked there. Each author used his contribution to set out the advantages and, most vocally of all, the disadvantages of working within its portals. The book appeared as part of 'The Whitehall Series', edited by Sir James Marchant (1867–1956), and consisted of a preface written by the then Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, and sixteen chapters.[9] The choice of Marchant is notable because he was not a civil servant nor had he ever held a post in national government, but was a well-known Victorian eugenicist and social reformer and former Director of the National Council of Public Morals.[10] Long before the advent of the contemporary tabloid press, the operation of government in Whitehall was to be scrutinised in terms of its ethical and moral standards. Were the ruling classes morally upright enough to justify and maintain their position? The answer to that question partially explains the defensive tone taken by the authors of the volumes within this series.[11]

Space prevents a complete analysis of the whole of The Whitehall Series, but the authors do have things in common that extend beyond their professional experience. Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, the author of the volume on the Board of Trade, was, like Marchant, a committed social reformer and was devoutly religious. Sir Edward Troup, who contributed a study of the Home Office, was the son of an Aberdeenshire minister in the Scottish Kirk and was a trained moral philosopher, while Sir Thomas Heath, author of the tome on the Treasury, was a classicist. Collectively, they epitomised a commitment to morally upright thought and behaviour that was rooted in Christian morality and a knowledge of classical civilisations.[12] The relatively late addition of the Foreign Office to the series appears to have been because the then Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Vansittart, while wanting his department to be included, unlike his counterparts elsewhere in Whitehall, did not wish to write the book himself. Anyone familiar with Vansittart's eccentric writing style combined with the likely narrowness of the brief would not be surprised by his reluctance and might even be relieved that he took this decision.[13] Pleading pressure of work, he approached Tilley, whose professional credentials within the Foreign Office were at least equal to his own, but he too was reluctant to take on the task. What appears to have changed Tilley's mind was an agreement that Gaselee would write half the book. And there were other sources of disquiet and potential threats to existing Foreign Office culture and operation.

One was the Foreign Office's reactions to the Tomlin Royal Commission on the Civil Service.[14] The Commission was established by the Ramsay MacDonald government in 1929 and published its findings two years later. Among these it recommended the enhancement of the role of female civil servants to include equal pay with their male counterparts and equal career opportunities. The Commission's report, which was to do important work to prepare the ground for the Equal Opportunities legislation of the 1970s, had ruffled a great many feathers in the ranks of the Foreign Office and senior Civil Service. One of Vansittart's predecessors as Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir William Tyrrell, had given evidence to the Commission. He had been given an uncomfortable, well-documented grilling about why, *inter alia*, there were no women among the senior ranks of the Diplomatic Service or within the Foreign Office Establishment.[15]

It is difficult not to be struck by the defensive tone taken, especially by Tilley in his half of the book. For him, the history of the Foreign Office should be understood through the evolution of the different grades of clerks. It gives a very clear account of the development of the two roles of Parliamentary Under Secretary and Permanent Under Secretary, with the eventual emergence of the latter as the more important and more senior position. On the one hand, it is a Burkeian defence of the merits of maintaining the *status quo*; on the other, there is a Whiggishness that accepts that some change is necessary, even desirable, but in a measured, gradual way. The nature and speed of that

change should be determined by the Foreign Office for the Foreign Office, not by outside bodies. Exceptions were when reforms benefited the clerks of the Foreign Office financially or resulted in greater involvement in areas of policy making that they wished to have. Tilley's chapters also make it clear that avenues of communication outwards from the Foreign Office to those with the power to reform the wider structure of government were fractured. In his view, it had taken too many years for his plight and that of his contemporaries to be recognised. It was a waste of talent and money to consign those with the intelligence and aptitude to survive the rigours of the Civil Service and Foreign Office selection process to the task of mindless copying of despatches and telegrams. But Tilley was clear that the Foreign Office itself was largely to blame for this situation and pointed out that when it decided on major reform in 1905–6 it looked to other departments, notably the Colonial Office, for models.[16]

The Tilley and Gaselee book is one by Foreign Office insiders, perhaps more readily understood by other insiders than by the wider public for whom it was intended. The changing role of the Diplomatic Service is almost absent, and while Tilley did enjoy a successful career as part of the Diplomatic Service, the book makes it clear that his heart and loyalties lay in London. But there is more to this than a simple matter of emphasis. The book reveals that within the Foreign Office in the mid-1930s, the division between the Diplomatic Service and the Establishment, that is, those clerks who were based mostly or entirely in Whitehall, was still firmly in place, even though they had been formally merged in 1919. While Tilley identified more with the clerical classes within the Establishment than with the Diplomatic Service, he might have been expected to focus more on the Diplomatic Service, leaving Gaselee to write about the situation in Whitehall. That this did not prove to be the case, suggests that the distinction was already becoming blurred. As the twentieth century evolved, the cross-fertilisation between the two groups became so extensive and frequent, that subsequent generations of commentators on the diplomacy and statecraft of British foreign policy would have experienced an even greater problem separating the two. The similarity of the level of professional training and the socio-economic backgrounds of new recruits and the similarity of the selection processes were themselves enmeshed in the multi-layered and diverse approaches taken to the resolution of diplomatic problems as the twentieth century progressed and gave way to the twenty-first. Consequently, British diplomatic careers have long alternated between serving at home and overseas as an intrinsic part of their structure. Likewise, there are few members of the Whitehall Establishment who have never been posted abroad. Even in Tilley's and Gaselee's day few members of the Whitehall establishment had never been posted abroad.[17]

A generation after the Tilley and Gaselee book was published, an attempt to write, literally, a New History of Whitehall, began.[18] The aim of the series was to

demonstrate how the experience of the Second World War had led to the evolution of a modern, fit-for-purpose, much more democratic culture within the British government. The volume on the Foreign Office that emerged as part of this series, nominally written by Lord (William) Strang, a former Permanent Under Secretary (1949–1951), was far less lively than that of Tilley and Gaselee. While Strang's name appeared on the cover, the task of writing notes for the chapters was farmed out to individual departments within the Foreign Office. This strategy maximised the chances of factual accuracy and meant that the different 'voices' of the departments were 'heard' by the reader.[19] This approach, when used as a metaphor for the Foreign Office itself conveyed the notion of an organic entity, with many different moving parts, each contributing to the whole. At the same time, the reader was encouraged to view the Foreign Office as something greater than the sum of those parts through the personality and role of the Permanent Under-Secretary. Its very specific purpose was to describe and assess the impact of the Eden Reforms of 1944, especially on the post-Second World War Foreign Service.[20] But that was not to imply that the London Establishment was deemed to be less relevant. Indeed, C.J. Hubbert, who acted as the main collator of research materials for the book, was a former senior member of Branch B of the Civil Service who had been brought out of retirement specially for the task.[21] Most of the actual chapter writing was done by Daniel Lascelles (1902–1967) shortly before he took up the post of ambassador to Afghanistan. The willingness of Sir Alexander Cadogan to act as an informal adviser on Foreign Office procedure, gave the book even greater official sanction.[22] This also suggests that, despite the input of Hubbert and Lascelles, as well as of Professor Llewellyn Woodward, who acted as historical adviser, that this history was intended to reemphasise the importance of the role of Permanent Under-Secretary. The book contained rather less about the plight of the lower ranks than the Tilley and Gaselee tome.[23]

Lascelles had been asked to make the book accessible to the 'layman'; that is, someone who was not a Foreign Office insider. This deliberate attempt to make the book more outward-facing than the Tilley and Gaselee book, occasionally backfired it seems, and it is likely that only lip service was paid to this brief. Lascelles was deemed to have exercised a little too much literary licence and to have taken a 'controversial line, with which not all would agree'.[24] Ultimately, however, Lascelles' prose passed the scrutiny not only of Strang but of a coterie of his peers, including Sir Pierson Dixon (1904–1965), Sir Frank Roberts (1907–1998), Sir Ashley Clarke (1903–1994) and Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh (1909–1994), suggesting that it was viewed as a model of restraint and good judgement.[25] The deployment of such an impressive range of luminaries also enabled the Foreign Office to choreograph exactly the view that it wished the outside world to have of its personnel, culture and operation. The 'layman' may have been the target reader, but he was only going to learn about the Foreign Office what officials wished him to know, nothing more.

It was not simply 'outsiders' who needed to be kept at bay. Strang's desire for editorial control also extended to the political head of the Foreign Office, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. When Eden requested a copy of the book, Strang thought that he should be allowed to read it only when the proofs had been checked and it had gone to press.[26] Strang and his colleagues had other reasons for handling Eden carefully. In 1943, during the Second World War, Eden had been instrumental in initiating a series of reforms within the Foreign Office, most of which had met a lukewarm response. These included the merging of the Diplomatic and Consular Services. But most of all, the reforms were intended to modernise Foreign Office professional culture, making recruitment more democratic to all its divisions, and to bury forever its reputation for snobbery and insularity.[27] The book was intended to demonstrate that the Foreign Office had considered these recommendations. Considered them, yes, but not necessarily adopted them. This constraint explains why Lascelles, although he had written the book, was not prepared to put his name to it as a serving member of the Diplomatic Service (and why Strang was persuaded to do so instead).[28] Association was synonymous with condonation, and that could have meant professional suicide. Eden was seen as a particularly troublesome political head of the Foreign Office. In Eden, Cadogan, saw a man in a hurry; and too much so.[29]

These themes are also explored in John Connell's seldom cited *The Office*.[30] However, despite its title Connell's book says relatively little about the internal workings of the Foreign Office, instead providing a lively and sometimes highly critical account of the conduct of British foreign policy in the period 1919–1951. Most academic historians of the Foreign Office have opted to cover a relatively narrow period, usually to make a series of very specific chronological points, rather than to provide a broad sweeping narrative that would involve taking on larger, more complex topics, such as professional culture, recruitment and the role of women.[31] Exceptions include the work of Valerie Cromwell and T.G. Otte, whose books, *inter alia*, deliberately map questions of formal and informal cultural and working practices over a number of generations.[32] Both took considerable inspiration from the pioneering work of Zara Steiner, whose book on the Edwardian Foreign Office, published in the late 1960s, has shaped the way in which at least two generations of international historians have written about the diplomacy and statecraft of the Foreign Office.[33] The idea of the Foreign Office as a social space, as a place of work, rather than simply a place where strategies for the conduct of British foreign policy were born was explored in Keith Hamilton's wonderful study of the Foreign Office during the nineteenth century.[34] Otte has also collaborated with the late Canadian historian, Keith Neilson to explore the history of the office of Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office.[35] The present author has added to this literature by bringing together the worlds of the scholar and the diplomatic practitioner, as well as

highlighting the role played by women in the British Foreign Service and the London Establishment.[36] The Foreign Office has also been the focus of other works, for example, on the history and architecture of the building in which it is housed in Whitehall.[37]

That, broadly, therefore, is the historical and historiographical context to how and why the history of the Foreign Office has been written in the form that it has. To return to the question of writing an official history of some or all of its several identities, another important dimension is the existence of the FCDO's Historical Section (now known as FCDO Historians).[38] Historians first joined the Foreign Office in 1918 to provide the Foreign Secretary with expert academic guidance and contextual explanation of contemporary foreign policy issues. Their development during the subsequent century since its creation has continued to demonstrate the relevance of such a role. More significantly, for most of their existence, the Historians have overseen the publication of three series of documents on British foreign policy, mostly dating from the twentieth century.[39] The origin of these volumes, from within the Foreign Office itself, gives them a status that is different from similar projects undertaken by scholars elsewhere. They also anticipated the interest that historians would take in understanding the origins of the Second World War and the connection with the causes and consequences of the First World War. These volumes have both an inward and an outward facing role. All are produced by members of the Historians' team, who are trained academic historians, educated to PhD level and beyond, and most are experienced authors and editors. Many scholars would contend that this meets part of the definition of an official history: history written by scholars with the sanction of the department in question. There are a number of advantages to such an arrangement. Members of the Historians' team have privileged access to government documents, although many are, or soon become, available for independent inspection at The National Archives, Kew. The thoroughness of the research and the academic rigour of the editorial work makes the volumes important overviews or introductions to the topic, although it is not possible to tell how comprehensive the coverage is without wider, independent research. Disadvantages to the various published series of documents include the fact that although they have a strong focus on Britain's relations with Europe, coverage of other regions is less comprehensive, coverage begins only in the late nineteenth century, and many volumes of *DBFP* do not include minutes and marginalia (although the other two series do).

A further reason why the ethical and intellectual robustness of the volumes produced by the FCDO Historians is regarded as being of the highest order is because, in producing them, the editors have never shied away from controversy and the revelation of policy skeletons that might otherwise have been left uncovered. The same is true of their *History Notes* series. The evidence from both sources demonstrates that the Historians have not been persuaded to go

native – a pressure that many fear is applied to official historians or to historians of officialdom. A good example is the excellent *History Note* on the Katyn Massacre.[40] That said, probably the most persuasive way of silencing any remaining critics sceptical about the independence of their work – they are, after all, as civil servants, literally in the pay of the government – is for any official historian or team of historians, to be drawn from outside their ranks, at least to some degree, as was wholly the case with both *BDOW* and *DBFP*, as well as with several volumes of *DBPO*.

Reference has already been made to the scale of the research undertaking that writing an official history of the Foreign Office would entail. When one realises that the amount of shelf space needed to house the General Correspondence Series (FO 371) since 1906 alone is measured by the mile rather than by the metre, the temptation is to write off the project as an impossibility. But to focus on this kind of point is to miss something important – the intention is not to write a history of British foreign policy, but an organisational history of the government body responsible for its formation and execution. The two are related, of course, but ultimately are quite different things. An official historian of the Foreign Office is more likely to be interested in the archives of the Chief Clerk's Department or the archives of the Civil Service Commission than in the record of British diplomacy. Likewise, many of the archives of the numerous Royal Commissions on the Civil Service since the mid nineteenth century are housed, uncatalogued, within the archives of the Treasury, not the Foreign Office.

A detailed examination of the history of government bureaucracy and its impact on the Foreign Office might be viewed as a dry subject, but an attractive feature of the Tilley and Gaselee book is its vignettes of individual clerks and diplomats. This human dimension is important but can be difficult to trace. Only a very small percentage of officials kept a diary or were close enough to the process of policy formulation to make what little private correspondence that may have survived to be of any use. That said, a significant number of diplomats and officials have contributed to the British Diplomatic Oral History Project, housed at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge. But where it does survive, such documentation provides an important substratum to the archival footprint, since officials were often more candid in private correspondence than in their official communications. It provides important insights into how a class of officials viewed a particular issue when viewed collectively. That Foreign Office officials were required to conform to a civil service grading system from the middle of the nineteenth century also gives merit to the idea of studying officials as a cohort as well as, or instead of, examining the careers of individuals. What today would be known as job descriptions or level descriptors for these grades can be found in the archives of the Civil Service Commission at Kew, so we know what the expectation was for each level of professional performance. Branch A consisted of members of

the Foreign Service, primarily diplomats and specialist clerks, such as embassy archivists and research assistants, and consisted of nine grades, nine being the most junior. Branch B was predominantly the Whitehall-based Establishment and consisted of six grades, again, six being the most junior. Branches C and D were made up of an eclectic mixture of classes, anything from cooks to doormen. A detailed study, whether with official status or not, of any of these groups would be a useful way of examining the history and operation of the Foreign Office.

A useful avenue would be to employ prosopographic, that is, 'collective biographical' methods to analyse the careers of the officials whose thumbnail biographies exist in all of the volumes of the *Foreign Office List*, published annually between 1865 and 2006.[41] Most contain the full name and date of birth of the official, and, in some cases, details of their educational background, as well as a summary of their career to date. A sample, that is, a specifically identified group, could be created by employing simple techniques such as chronology, school or university attended, officials of a specific grade, gender, patterns of professional service, such as embassies served or forms of regional specialisation. Supplementary biographical material is available online, *inter alia*, through *Who's Who*, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and through subscriber genealogical websites such as *Ancestry* or *Find my Past*. From these sources, we can often trace the clerk's life through census returns, their personal life, including marriage and children, as well as details of their families of origin and places of birth and death. In many cases, a limitation of this approach is the paucity of complete data and the inevitable need to draw generalisations about groups of individuals rather than being able to identify specific examples of what these individuals thought and said.[42] However, official histories are not predominantly social studies. A lack of specificity in that area would not necessarily be detrimental to the book. But enough data in that area could be available to make meaningful comment on the day-to-day context of the work of Foreign Office clerks possible.

This approach is not without precedent. The closest we have to a prosopographic history of the Foreign Office is by the American historian, Charles Ronald Middleton. His *Administration of British foreign policy, 1782–1846*, published by Duke University Press in 1977, contains thumbnail biographies of all the clerks who served in the Foreign Office during this period, including the location of any relevant archival sources. Middleton does not use the data in the way a social scientist might, for example, to construct network analyses or an assessment of group dynamics, although the material is detailed enough to be used in such a way. Instead, Middleton refers to individual clerks within the remaining text of the book, highlighting the additional biographical information available in the book's annex. An example of one of the biographies is:

Adams, William Pitt, (11 December 1804-1 September 1852)

Born to William Dacres Adams, Secretary to William Pitt and clerk in the Home Office by Elizabeth daughter of Mayow Wynall-Mayow of Sydenham, Kent, educated Westminster 1817-20 and Oriel Oxford 1823-26, married Georgina Emily daughter of Robert Lukin, a nephew of William Wyndham.[43] Clerk 1826-1834, special mission to The Hague on business connected with American boundary discussions 1830, then attached to Washington with his clerk's salary 1830-1834.[44] Secretary of Legation Bogota 1834 and Mexico 1841, Consul General in Peru 1842 until he was assassinated there.[45]

This model could be used as a template for similar studies of Foreign Office clerks and members of the Diplomatic Service, or any other permutation of individuals, over a variety of timeframes to show the make-up of networks, demographic and social change, evolving attitudes towards gender, and changes to career patterns over time. This data would be of use not only to scholars of British foreign policy, but potentially to the Foreign Office itself, as it attempts to map a way forward in the Whitehall of twenty-first century.

This article has set out the Foreign Office's relationship with developing notions of official history. The early attempts to write its history were motivated more by the defence of operational culture and practice – a demonstration of a government department that was fit for purpose – than by grander historical reasons. It is doubtful whether the authors had much sense of writing a history that was outward-facing beyond the corridors of Whitehall. Any admission of 'outsiders' to their world is coincidental. The work of the Historians' team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is certainly outward-facing, but its primary research output, *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, focuses on British foreign policy and not the institution. It is doubtful whether additional resources would be made available to write the history, official or otherwise, of the Foreign Office. That leaves the task to academic historians and perhaps retired civil servants and journalists familiar with the history and operation of Whitehall. Most would probably be put off by the scale of the undertaking, but this does still leave a number of questions. Do we need a history of the Foreign Office that covers the entirety of its history? And if we do, who would find such a study useful? To answer the second question first, anyone with an interest in the history of government would find such a study useful – but are these people so numerous as to warrant such an undertaking? A more pertinent consideration is that most historians of British foreign policy work on discrete areas and therefore tend not to be concerned with the broad sweep of the history of the Foreign Office. But a history of, for example, the Foreign Office during the First World War, should have the context in which it operated included in the analysis, and much more rigorously so than that attempted by Tilley, Gaselee and Strang. During the four years of that conflict, the organisation and culture of the Foreign Office changed dramatically and often at great speed as it attempted to remain responsive to the challenges posed by fighting and winning the war.

The human dimension, with all its implications – flexibility, adaptability, sacrifice, commitment and professionalism – were central to meeting these challenges. It is for this reason that it is essential to view the history of any government department at least partly through the lens of those who worked there as much as through reflections on the histories of Royal Commissions and other reviews of government recruitment and practice. The history of the Foreign Office in other periods reveals similar challenges to its personnel, although not always on the same scale and in the same way. But these factors should be central to the task of writing the history of British foreign policy since 1782, especially the 'view' from Whitehall.

Notes

1. About us – Foreign & Commonwealth Office – GOV.UK
2. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office – GOV.UK.
3. I am grateful to Dr Richard Smith for this chart.
4. 'The Foreign Office', in ed. Sir A.W. Ward and G.P. Gooch, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 539–630.
5. Sir John Tilley, *London to Tokyo* (London: Hutchinson, 1942).
6. J. Tilley, S. Gaselee, *The Foreign Office* (London: Putnam, 1933); A.S.F. Gow, "Sir Stephen Gaselee," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 29 (1943): 441–61; R. Storres, revised, D. McKitterick, "Sir Stephen Gaselee," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33347.
7. I. Nish, *British Envoys in Japan 1859–1972* (London: The Japan Society, 2004), 123–31.
8. Ibid.
9. Tilley, Gaselee, vii-x.
10. "Sir J. Marchant: A Tireless Social Worker," *The Times*, May 22, 1956, 11.
11. At the time of the publication of the volume on the Foreign Office, the series had already run to ten books, the majority of which were overseen or written by a recent Permanent Under Secretary within the department in question.
12. For example, Sir E. Troup, *The Home Office* (London: Putnam, 1925); Sir Thomas Heath, *The Treasury* (London: Putnam, 1927) and Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, *The Board of Trade* (London: Putnam, 1928). See also, J. Pellew, *The Home Office, 1848–1914* (1982); "Sir Thomas Little Heath, 1861–1940," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 26 (1940): 424–38; R. Davidson, "Llewellyn Smith, the labour department and government growth, 1886–1909," in *Studies in the growth of nineteenth-century government*, ed. G. Sutherland (London: Routledge. 1972), 227–62.
13. N. Rose, *Vansittart: study of a diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1978); Robert Gilbert Vansittart, Baron Vansittart, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36630.
14. Useful summaries: H.J. Laski, "The Tomlin Report on the Civil Service," *Political Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1931): 457–608; L.D. White, "The British Royal Commission on the Civil Service," *American Political Science Review* 26, no. 2 (1932), 315–8.
15. The papers relating to the Tomlin Commission are scattered across a number of classifications in the British Treasury papers, but see especially, T 173/22, The National Archives (hereafter TNA).
16. Tilley, Gaselee, 154.

17. An exception who rose to the rank of Permanent Under Secretary was Sir Eyre Crowe.
18. The series was commissioned by the Government Organisation Committee. Its papers can be found in CAB 134/314, TNA.
19. Memorandum by Strang, November 12, 1953, FO 366/3040, TNA. I am grateful to Dr Richard Smith for sharing this material.
20. Memorandum by Strang, November 12, 1953, FO 366/3040, TNA.
21. At this time, Branch A of the Civil Service consisted mostly of members of the Diplomatic Service, and a few specialist roles, such as Researchers attached to the Librarian's Department. Branch B was the most senior of the three divisions of clerks, the others being Branches C and D.
22. P. Gore-Booth, rev. G.R. Berridge, "Sir Alexander George Montagu Cadogan," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32234
23. Memorandum by Strang, November 12, 1953, FO 366/3040, TNA.
24. *Ibid*.
25. N.P. Ludlow, "Sir Pierson John Dixon" https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32839; A. Campbell, "Sir Frank Kenyon Roberts" https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/67498; J.J. Norwich, "Sir Henry Ashley Clarke," https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/54810; M.T. Thornhill, "Sir Charles Arthur Evelyn Shuckburgh" https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/55716, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. See also: E. Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: diaries, 1951–56* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986).
26. Minute by Eden, November 26, 1953; minute by Strang, November 27, 1953, FO 366/3040, TNA.
27. A. Adamthwaite, "Britain and the world, 1945–1949: the view from the Foreign Office," *International Affairs* 61, no. 2 (1985): 223–35.
28. Minute by Sir Robert Fraser, April 27, 1953, FO 366/3040, TNA.
29. Cadogan's views on Eden are set out most forcefully in his well-known diary. D. Dilks ed.: *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938–1945* (London: Cassell, 1971).
30. *The Office: A study of British foreign policy and its makers, 1919–1951* (London: Allan Wingate, 1958).
31. Many nevertheless provide important insights, for example, R. Warman, "The erosion of Foreign Office influence in making policy, 1916–1918," *The Historical Journal* 15, no. 1 (1972): 133–59; Z. Steiner and M.L. Dockrill, "The Foreign Office reforms, 1919–1921," *Historical Journal* 17, no. 1 (1974): 131–56.
32. V. Cromwell, *Revolution and evolution: British government in the nineteenth century* (London: Prentice, 1977); "Interpretations of nineteenth century administration: an analysis," *Victorian Studies* 9, no. 3 (1966): 245–55; and Z. Steiner, "The Foreign Office before 1914: a study in resistance," in *Studies in the growth of nineteenth century government*, ed. G. Sutherland (London: Routledge, 1972); T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind, 1865–1914: the making of British foreign policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
33. Z. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and foreign policy, 1898–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Also methodologically important is her *Britain and the origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977).
34. K. Hamilton, *Servants of diplomacy: a domestic history of the Victorian Foreign Office* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
35. T.G. Otte, with K. Neilson, *The Office of Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854–1946* (London: Routledge, 2008).
36. G. Johnson, ed., *The Foreign Office and British diplomacy in the twentieth century* (London: Routledge, 2004).

37. I. Toplis, *The Foreign Office: an architectural history* (London: Mansell, 1987); Anthony Seldon, *The Foreign Office: An illustrated history of the place and its people* (London: HarperCollins, 2000)
38. 'History at the heart of diplomacy. Historians in the Foreign Office, 1918–2018', *History Note* No. 22, provides as useful overview of their history and range of activities. This can also be obtained free of charge on the www.issuu.com/fcohistorians platform.
39. The first, which began publication in the late 1920s, was *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914* (*BDOW*), which ran to eleven volumes. The second series, which stemmed from a Cabinet decision during the final year of the Second World War to publish documents relating to what came to be known as the interwar period was *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939* (*DBFP*), which ran to four series and more than sixty volumes. For many years published concurrently was the *Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO)*, which began production in 1973, and which consists of approximately thirty volumes. The *DBPO* series remains in production today.
40. "The Katyn Massacre: and SOE perspective," *History Notes*, no. 10 (1996). This can be obtained free of charge from the www.issuu.com/fcohistorians website.
41. The most influential study of prosopography as a research tool for historians is L. Stone, "Prosopography," *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (1971): 46–79.
42. Although some of this might be evident in any minutes on documents they may have left. But that would only be true of officials in Branches A and B, and even these are likely to be only sporadic.
43. G. F. Russell Barker and Alan H. Stenning, eds., *The Record of Old Westminsters* (2 vols.; London, 1928), vol. 1, 5.
44. Personnel: Register of Service, FO 366/329, TNA.
45. William Pitt Adams, *Papers Relating to the Death and Funeral of the Late William Pitt Adams, Esq*. (London, 1853). Middleton, 261.

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Notes on contributor

Gaynor Johnson is Professor Emerita in International History at the University of Kent, UK, and an Honorary Researcher in the Centre for War and Diplomacy at Lancaster University. Her most recent publications and current book plans relate to the history and operation of the British Foreign Office and the use of prosopography as a research tool for international historians. She has published widely on twentieth century British foreign policy, including gender history. She is also the editor of *Diplomacy and Statecraft* and the *International History Review*.