

DOCUMENTS ON BRITISH POLICY OVERSEAS

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In order to place *Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO)* in context, I should like to say a few words about the role of the Historians team within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This will indicate the wide range of tasks that we undertake and help explain why the production rate of *DBPO* has not been as rapid as we would have liked. Our team currently comprises three full-time historians: one senior editor and two assistant editors, together with one part-time editor (Dr Keith Hamilton, who retired as a full-time editor in 2002). A second senior editor's post is now vacant but we hope to be able to make a new appointment some time during the next year. In addition we have the assistance of two support staff, helping with technical production and historical enquiries. In other words, the team is significantly smaller than when this group last met in Canberra two years ago.

We have four main areas of work:

1. Outreach tasks

Historians play a role in the FCO's public diplomacy, helping to build links with the wider community both in the United Kingdom and overseas. In 2004, for example, we took a leading part in the creation of a Churchill Room at the Livadia Palace, scene of the Yalta conference in February 1945. Conceived as a counterpart to the existing Roosevelt Room, the project saw historians working together with Lady Soames (Sir Winston's daughter) and the British Embassy in Kiev to provide books and audio-visual material for what became a striking memorial and a useful research facility. The unveiling of the Churchill Room was greeted by widespread and favourable media coverage in Britain, Ukraine and Russia. We are also involved in the Allied Museum Berlin, which commemorates the Allied military presence in the divided city during the Cold War. We represent the UK on the international committee of experts at the museum and one of our team chaired the working party that organised a recent exhibition on the work of the Allied Military Liaison Mission.

2. Occasional publications

Details of recent publications were given in Heather Yasamee's contribution to the Canberra conference in 2003. Since then we have produced *Frank Foley*: documents published in 2004 to mark the unveiling of a plaque in honour of the SIS officer in Berlin in the 1930s who made great efforts to get Jews out of Nazi Germany; *Records of the PUS's Department*, published (on the web only) to coincide with the release of the first tranche of secret service material held by the FCO to the National Archives at Kew; and *The CICERO Papers* (also web only), on newly-released documents relating to the notorious case of the spy in the British Embassy at Ankara during the Second World War.

3. Other services to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

These include providing historical advice to ministers, senior officials and posts abroad; the vetting of manuscripts submitted by former and serving FCO officials and ministers; and assisting with public enquiries, including requests under the Freedom of Information Act. The scale of these tasks can vary considerably but they can tie up staff resources for months on end. Recent work by Historians on diplomatic memoirs and Northern Ireland judicial inquiries falls into this category.

4. Editing and publishing DBPO.

What I have said so far gives an indication of the competing priorities we face at a time when our staff is smaller than ever before. In recent years our flagship project, *DBPO*, has had to compete with these other demands and, because the demands are so immediate and our numbers so small, it has tended to slip down the priority list.

With these considerations in mind, FCO Historians decided in 2003 to try a new approach: electronic publication. The first volume of *e-DBPO* has gone to the publishers and is due to appear in the spring of 2006. Series III, Volume V, *The Year of Europe: America, Europe and the Energy Crisis, 1972-1974*, takes the form of a hardback book containing editorial material, accompanied by two CD-ROMs containing the documents. We feel that the new format offers a number of advantages over traditional hard-copy volumes. It enables us to publish more documents: over 500 as opposed to no more than 150 in conventional volumes.

The documents themselves take the form of attractive high-quality facsimile images, reproducing the original in colour, with all its marginal annotations and minutes. They have been produced by using readily-available Adobe software. In addition, optical character recognition (OCR) makes the documents fully searchable.

There are of course some drawbacks. The CD-ROM is no longer cutting-edge technology, and in the long run we shall probably need to consider web publication. But this means finding a web platform: our documents are very resource-intensive and beyond the capacity of the FCO's website. Publishing electronic documents poses challenges to established editorial techniques. Traditional footnoting, for example, is impossible. Our solution is to use small click-on boxes containing cross-references or additional information – but these are employed much more sparingly than in traditional hard-copy volumes.

We have two more electronic volumes in production: *Berlin in Crisis, 1948-90*, focusing on three Berlin crises in 1948-9, 1958-61 and 1989-90, and *Britain and German Unification, 1987-90*. They represent an experiment: we will have to see how users respond before deciding whether to continue. There are possible alternatives, ranging from a return to wholly hard-copy publication to publication wholly on the web. All have their pros and cons. Hard-copy in the old sense is not possible with current staffing levels: we cannot now achieve the traditional scale and quality of editorial input, while keying in the text is very labour-intensive. Going wholly on to the web, as we have seen, requires finding a host, as well as a decision about whether to provide documents free of charge or try to charge for them (at the moment the Treasury requires us to recover costs). But *e-DBPO* also presents challenges. Experience has shown that it too is labour-intensive – perhaps not much less so than the old-fashioned keying-in of text. There are many stages in the production process. Each requires some skill and some training: not much in itself, perhaps, but a lot when people move around as frequently as they do in the Foreign Office.

Electronic publication does not, therefore, provide any magic solutions. Nor does it provide an answer to the long-standing problem of filling the gaps in Series I-III of *DBPO*. In fact progress on Series III has been relatively good. A further hard-copy volume, *The Southern Flank in Crisis, 1972-76*, dealing with the overthrow of the Caetano regime in Portugal, the end of the Franco dictatorship in Spain and the Cyprus crisis of 1974, has been held up for a long time by clearance issues but is now due to appear in 2006. But the gaps for

the period before the late 1960s remain considerable and there is no possibility of filling them with current resource levels. A number of other options, including the use of contract editors have been under discussion for several years, but no decisions have yet been made. The heart of the problem remains lack of staff and competing priorities.