

Mandy Banton was formerly principal records specialist, diplomatic and colonial, at The National Archives of the UK. She is now a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. She has written and published on the regulation of labour within the British empire; is co-editor of the CD-ROM edition of the *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial: North America and the West Indies, 1574-1739* (London: Routledge, 2000); and author of *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968: A Guide to the Records of the Colonial Office in The National Archives of the UK* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2008).

The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers
edited by Sandra Courtman
Copyright remains with the author
Vol. 11 2010 ISSN 1471-2024
<http://www.caribbeanstudies.org>

**Records relating to the Caribbean in
The National Archives of the United Kingdom**

Mandy Banton

My aim in this paper is to touch on a variety of documentary sources held in The National Archives of the UK (TNA) which may be of use for Caribbean researchers and suggest the importance of understanding how things worked, and who was responsible for what.

Historians of the Caribbean, and other scholars working in historical periods, are likely to be familiar with the records of the Colonial Office and its predecessors held at Kew, and appreciate the relationship of those collections to records of the British colonial governments themselves. I refer researchers to my published guide.¹ There is, however, far less knowledge of the historic role of other departments of the British Government in colonial affairs and thus of the potential of their records as a resource for scholars. The paper outlines a range of departmental records, concentrating primarily on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and refers to some contemporary finding aids and other means of reference available. It covers records relating to independent states and foreign dependencies in the region as well as to the British West Indies.

It is perhaps difficult today to appreciate fully the relationship of the British Empire to the United Kingdom. It was not just a collection of diverse and distant countries with an historic,

but perhaps somewhat vague, relationship to Britain, as the Commonwealth is often seen now, but an integral part of the national whole. As such it was of importance to many Government departments, and it was not only the Colonial Office which had 'men on the spot'. At various periods the Treasury, Board of Customs, General Post Office and Board of Ordnance were represented by their own officials in many colonies; the War Office and Admiralty received reports from officers posted to regional military and naval stations; and the Foreign Office was alerted by its diplomats and consular officials to the conditions of British colonial subjects in foreign states and dependencies, and to foreign political developments with the potential to affect British interests.

In stressing the importance of knowing who was responsible for what, in the context of records at TNA, means understanding which Government department would take the lead action on a particular matter, or would have responsibility for policy development in a particular subject area. In many cases this will be quite obvious – for military operations, for example, it would be the Admiralty and/or War Office. Users of Colonial Office records will often find clues within the correspondence series for each dependency. These contain not only correspondence between the Colonial Office and the colonial governors, but also between the Colonial Office and other UK Government departments and related organisations. So a letter from the Foreign Office may have alerted the Colonial Office to serious labour unrest involving British West Indians in the Danish colony of St Croix; further correspondence and internal minuting will reveal Colonial Office action (or in this case, inaction), the involvement of the Royal Navy, and the unwillingness of the Treasury to sanction the cost of suggested evacuation of British subjects. But the most important material is in the series of Foreign Office papers relating to Denmark, which includes detailed reports from the British consul in the Danish Virgin Islands and describes subsequent negotiations by the British ambassador at Copenhagen for the commutation of death sentences on those involved in labour riots.

In other cases the balance of power between two departments may be uncertain. Would the Treasury always have power to veto proposed additional expenditure? Could the Colonial Office secure Cabinet support to overturn such a veto? Sometimes the division of responsibility may be more difficult to unravel. I was surprised to discover that colonial customs officials were responsible for Africans liberated from slave ships, either as a prize of war or following Parliamentary abolition of British involvement in the trade. As noted

above, such officials reported not to the governors and thence to the Colonial Office, but to the Board of Customs in London.

This last point leads us to a related matter of the utmost importance to researchers. To what extent were local events and the detail of local administration reported to London? When England began to 'plant' colonies it was intended that they should be 'New Englands' rather than an extension of the mother country; each should have its own internal government. The composition of such governments varied enormously, both from place to place and from time to time, to the extent that one historian has commented: 'Perhaps there really was a rule at the Colonial Office that no colony should have a constitution exactly like that of any other colony; if so, it was enforced with an entirely untypical uniformity.'² To explain the structure in the most general of terms, each colony was headed by a governor (not necessarily with that title), the representative of the reigning monarch, supported usually by an executive committee or council, and over time a two-chamber legislature developed often with elected as well as appointed members. Under this top tier there would be a range of local government departments, whose staff were employed by the colonial government although the most senior were often appointed by the Colonial Office, or more accurately by the Crown. TNA holds copies of the formal proceedings of the legislatures, but not the records of the departments of local government, which remain, if they have survived, in the Caribbean.

To use Barbados as an example, by 1878 its civil establishment consisted of the Colonial Secretary's Office, Treasurer's Office, Inland Revenue Department, Audit Office, Customs, Police and Prisons, Post Office, Public Works, Harbour-Master's Office, Lunatic Asylum and Lazaretto, Savings Bank, Public Library and Board of Health.³ There were separate judicial, educational and ecclesiastical establishments. A Military Department with responsibility for the Leeward and Windward Islands was also based in Barbados. All departments produced annual reports, which are usually to be found at TNA (in the Sessional Papers or Correspondence series for each dependency), but they are often brief and do not provide a detailed picture of the work of a department, let alone the individual cases with which it dealt. From 1862 until 1940 lists of local government departments and their senior staff are given in the annual *Colonial Office List*; from about 1820 similar information is provided in the annual Blue Books of Statistics, copies of which are also at TNA and which were often published for Parliament.

Although the secretary of state for the colonies was ultimately responsible to the British government, and thence to the UK Parliament, for the peace, order and good government of the colonies, day-to-day responsibility for administration was effectively devolved to the governors and the colonial governments. Governors had considerable (but varying) authority to run the dependencies as they saw fit, subject to instructions issued on their appointment, the agreement of their legislatures and pressure from other local interests. They did not report everything to London; local events now considered of major importance may be hardly mentioned, whereas trivial matters may have given rise to extensive correspondence because a governor needed to seek approval from the home government for a suggested course of action, was unsure of his own authority vis-à-vis other interests, or wished to deflect potential censure. And it is worth bearing in mind that before the introduction of the inter-continental telegraph it was impossible for a governor to seek advice before taking action on a really urgent matter; it could be many weeks before his despatch reached London and many more before he received a response.

TNA's online catalogue gives an idea of the range of departments with an interest in the Caribbean, but a search for records relating to an individual island or mainland territory needs to be treated with caution; many of TNA's most important records, including the Colonial Office correspondence series, are essentially uncatalogued for some or all of the periods they cover.⁴ Using the catalogue, however, and to take just one small example, a search on 'Barbados' restricted to the years 1800-1820 produces hits for 14 Government departments and related organisations, plus references to five collections of extracted maps and plans. Clicking on the number at the end of each hit takes us to a list of the documents. Clicking on any one of these entries sometimes provides an expanded description, and always tells us where the document is held and if it is open.

When I made this search in early 2010 while writing a conference proposal I found that most hits were from the Admiralty – a total of 134 references - followed by only 62 from the Colonial Office. Repeating the search at the beginning of June I found 138 Admiralty hits and 107 for the Colonial Office. The increase in Colonial Office references is due to my own ongoing cataloguing of the Barbados correspondence series CO 28; and I think the additional Admiralty references come from recent cataloguing of a collection of naval surgeons' journals, which I refer to below. On another occasion, however, I found only 81 Admiralty

hits. To get fewer hits is very disconcerting, and is as much a mystery to the catalogue manager at TNA as it is to me. I think the lesson must be not to rely on a single search, but to repeat it.

The Admiralty documents referenced include requests for passages and stores; details of expenses and appointments; pay lists for the Admiralty yard; hospital musters; and registers of American, French, Dutch and Spanish prisoners of war held at Barbados during the period of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. They include a series of Navy Board out-letters (ADM 354) which is held not at TNA but in the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum.⁵ Perhaps confusingly, the search also identifies musters and logs for ships named 'Barbados' or 'Barbadoes'.⁶ Unfortunately the papers most likely to be of value, especially to those not primarily concerned with purely naval history – the series of Board of Admiralty in-letters (ADM 1) – do not appear amongst the hits since they have not been catalogued by subject, and access requires the use of contemporary indexes (ADM 12). Limitation of cataloguing accounts too for the comparative paucity of Colonial Office results in this particular search, although it was the Government department with primary responsibility for the administration of Barbados in the colonial period.

A three-year externally funded project known as 'Your Caribbean Heritage', and introduced to delegates at the 2006 Society for Caribbean Studies conference, catalogued a considerable proportion of the Colonial Office 'original correspondence' series relating to British dependencies in the Caribbean, but is still incomplete, and researchers may find themselves dependent on contemporary registers and indexes. Another reason for the lack of Barbados results is simple but not perhaps obvious; that is that such a catalogue search will not pick up all items within CO 28, the Barbados correspondence series, but only those with descriptions specifically mentioning Barbados, which are very much in the minority. It will find:

CO 28/87/30, Explains the circumstances in which the Barbados newspaper *The Globe* incorrectly stated that a letter from General Simon Bolivar had been addressed to the governor. It had in fact been addressed to Sir Ralph Woodford. With a copy of the letter [in Spanish, with English translation] and other enclosures. 1818 Dec 3.

But not:

CO 28/88/24, Reports the destruction of property, shipping, crops and food stores, and seven deaths, by 'one of those violent storms by which the West India Islands are so frequently ravaged'. States that because the interior is cut off by flooding he does not yet know the extent of the damage there. 1819 Oct 18.

Researchers concerned with only a fairly brief period, and lucky enough to find detailed cataloguing, are strongly advised to browse the relevant catalogue entries rather than relying on a word search. This also overcomes the problem of the use of varied terminology; a search on 'riots', for example, will not find relevant documents described as 'disturbances'.

The other 12 Government departments with records appearing in my initial limited search are as follows:

War Office and related bodies (29 hits); Privy Council (28); Treasury (17); Prerogative Court of Canterbury (11); Audit Office (6); Treasury Solicitor (5); Court of Chancery (4); Post Office (3); and, with one hit each, the Public Record Office, Supreme Court of Judicature, High Court of Admiralty, and High Court of Delegates.⁷ The five collections of maps, extracted from the records of various Government departments including the Colonial Office and War Office, have a combined total of 28 hits.⁸

What type of material is included?

- The 29 War Office (WO) records cover a variety of topics: the majority (17) are service records of men born in Barbados who served in the British Army, and there are returns and musters of regiments based there; others refer to 'free coloured' soldiers entitled to pensions on discharge, to lands and buildings owned or hired by the Ordnance Office, and to yellow fever. There are maps and plans.⁹
- The political power of the Privy Council (PC), the origins of which lie in the medieval King's Council, declined in the modern period. Its legislative role now consists of making orders in Council and issuing royal proclamations.¹⁰ Orders in Council are of two kinds: prerogative, such as those relating to the constitutions or currency of overseas territories; and statutory, made under the authority of an Act of Parliament.

Its administrative work also diminished with the transfer of fields of responsibility to committees of the Council or to other government departments, and, to quote TNA's catalogue, 'such work as remains is of a residual and multifarious character'. The documents revealed by this search are all listed under the heading 'miscellanea' and there is no detail of subject matter.

- Treasury (T). Records listed include locally compiled slave registers submitted to the Office for the Registry of Colonial Slaves, which are well-known and now available online; ledgers and invoice books of the Royal Africa Companies, papers relating to light houses and duties, and details of four seizures of ships, one of which was illegally carrying enslaved persons from Barbados to Trinidad in 1829. You may ask why this comes up in a search on 1800-1820. The reason is that the date range given to this document is that of the sub-series of so-called 'long papers' in which it is listed, rather than its actual covering dates.
- Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PROB). Until 1858 wills were proved in the ecclesiastical courts. The Prerogative Court of Canterbury was one of two English provincial courts (the other being at York) and as the senior of the two had responsibility for the grant of probate where property was held in both provinces and also in cases where individuals holding property in England or Wales, or members of the armed services, died abroad. The documents revealed by this search are inventories, or declarations, of the estates of 11 individuals. Three were military men and one was a judge in the Vice Admiralty Court; in other cases occupations are not given. Two were women; one described as a spinster, the other as a widow. I say a little more about probate records below.
- Audit Office (AO). All six references are to the accounts of governors and other officials.
- The Treasury Solicitor (TS) references are to opinions of the Law Officers on a number of matters including a memorial regarding the disposal of land escheated to the Crown, and insurance on port wine shipped from London for the use of the hospital at Barbados.

- Chancery (C) records relate to court cases. Catalogue entries give only the names of the parties involved and no detail of the cases themselves.
- Records with the POST letter-code are listed in TNA's catalogue, but held at the British Postal Museum and Archive.¹¹ Those noted here relate to various aspects of the packet boat service and overseas mail arrangements.
- Public Record Office (PRO) – the predecessor to TNA. The one hit here, PRO 30/24, relates not to a single document but to a collection: the papers of the earls of Shaftesbury gifted to TNA's predecessor. A search of the series itself gives 34 results, all of them earlier than my 1800-1820 date range. Some of the descriptions are rather unhelpful, referring for example to letters sent from named individuals in Barbados but giving no indication of content. Others concern hospital accommodation, an inventory of plantation stock, sale of a plantation, and a list of the 'most eminent planters'. There is a letter from Horatio Nelson concerning illegal trading by a ship sailing under United States colours.
- Supreme Court of Judicature (J). The one result relates to a court case between two Liverpool merchant companies relating to trade to Barbados and St Kitts.
- High Court of Admiralty (HCA). The one result for Barbados for this period consists of 'various returns as to prizes' and relates to other Caribbean, Indian and African dependencies. An earlier reference, 1791-3, headed 'Slave Trade', is to the journal of a voyage from Barbados towards Liverpool by a ship named *Hopewell*, and of a subsequent cruise as a privateer.
- The High Court of Delegates (DEL) was a predecessor of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Its one result for the period concerns a revenue appeal from Barbados in connection with a maritime legal case.

A catalogue search of these examples will not be comprehensive. Eighteenth-century War Office papers catalogued as 'from military commanders, West Indies' may be relevant, as,

indeed, may those described as ‘from Government Departments’; Treasury records are adequately catalogued for certain periods only, and the use of contemporary finding aids is needed; many records of the High Court of Admiralty are catalogued only by date.

Similar difficulties apply to the use of many other records, and researchers are advised to check the existence of a research guide (see below) or published handbook, or to seek the assistance of staff, rather than to assume that failure to find what they are looking for in the catalogue means that it is not there. I was surprised to find no hits for the Board of Customs (CUST) since I have recently seen a Customs document relating to the 1804 seizure of a French slave ship which was adjudicated by the Court of Vice Admiralty at Barbados and for which a Royal Navy officer attempted to get prize money over a period of many years. But this is because the document description does not refer to Barbados, but is given merely as ‘seizures’. It is listed under the sub-header ‘Barbados’ so should be found by use of the ‘advanced search’ facility, but I have been unsuccessful and I think there must be a hiccup in the way the entry has been input.

Repeating the Barbados search using different date ranges does, of course, give very different results and brings up material from other Government departments. I tried the years 1920 to 1938. A good number of the departments listed above do not appear, but additional ones are: Board of Trade, Cabinet, Foreign Office, and the Royal Botanic Gardens.¹² Also listed are the Royal Mint, Crown Agents for Oversea Governments, Air Ministry and RAF, Lord Chancellor’s Office, Ministry of Information, Tropical Products Institute, and Government Actuary’s Department. I am not going to outline these catalogue results as I did with the earlier search; brief administrative histories of the departments and lists of their record series can readily be found within the catalogue. But I say a little more below about Cabinet Office and Foreign Office, and here will mention the Board of Trade results for this period, of which there are the huge number of 997 (next comes the Colonial Office, with 385). The vast majority of these – 914 – refer to passenger lists of ships arriving at UK ports from Barbados, or which embarked passengers there during voyages from more distant places. These are usually seen as being primarily of interest to family historians and biographers but are clearly also a valuable resource for studies of migration. They say nothing about Barbados itself. Another 80 BT references are to records of merchant seamen born in Barbados, and there are two references to merchant ships – one named ‘Barbados’, the other registered there. The

two remaining documents of the total 997 concern a Bankruptcy Act passed in Barbados in 1925 and correspondence with Barbados arising from the 1930 Colonial Office Conference.

If one widens the catalogue search by omitting the restriction on the date range, the result is a single comment that there are at least 3000 results, and none is given. I have found that a restriction by date range is most helpful in such cases, unless one wishes to search on just one particular department, and knows the departmental code, in which case the optional year range field can often be left blank. This does not work with the Colonial Office (CO) – the ‘at least 3000’ message is repeated – but with Admiralty (ADM) it results in 436 hits ranging from 1673 (‘Report by the Council of Barbados on what they have done with the stores, with a note on embezzlement’) to 1942/4 (‘Responsibilities for local defence in Barbados and Santa Lucia, various requirements for the bases’).¹³ For the Foreign Office there are 84 hits dated 1899 to 1995. The bulk of Foreign Office material is inadequately catalogued prior to the 1950s, and records relating to British foreign policy dated before 1782, when the Foreign Office was established, are among records of the secretaries of state in various ‘State Paper’ (SP) series. A search on ‘Barbados’ limited to ‘SP’ but not restricted by date produces 109 hits, dated 1652 to 1777.

I referred above to ongoing cataloguing within TNA of series such as CO 28, Barbados original correspondence, and ADM 101, medical journals. Both were previously included in the catalogue, but in decidedly unhelpful terms; the often bulky volumes in CO 28 under descriptions such as ‘Despatches, 1805, Jan. – June’, and ADM 101 by ship’s name and date range. Given the labour intensive nature of cataloguing many such descriptions will unfortunately remain; these projects were possible only with external funding.¹⁴ ADM 101, although it has been held at TNA for many years, is relatively unknown, but the new and detailed cataloguing will make it invaluable for medical and naval historians and others. Much of the content describes the illness and treatment of named individuals, but there is also more general material, for example the concerns of James Nesbitt, a surgeon new to the West Indies, about the best treatment of diseases endemic there (my third example below), and much on wider scientific interests. An article on the project is included in the June 2010 edition of TNA’s research newsletter.¹⁵ The series includes journals by surgeons in Royal Navy, convict and migrant ships (although unfortunately only a small proportion of those journals were compiled). I offer a few examples here to whet your appetites:

Memorandum; on arrival at Barbados received 14 bullocks but no vegetables; men made to work in midday sun; great many changes to crew and pressing men from every ship they meet, including many unfit to serve; February 28 1806, took 14 men from the *Egyptienne*, a Guinea ship with 398 slaves on board, they were stripped, washed with salt water and then vinegar and issued with new clothes but kept separate because of risk of infection. [ADM 101/86/1/4, folio 18]

John Will, aged 27, seaman; taken ill at Port Royal Jamaica; disease or hurt, pain in the breast headache cough and a running nose, this man a black native of Barbadoes [Barbados] has had a regular catarrhal affection at a time; taken ill, 22 February 1806; discharged 27 February 1806 to duty. [ADM 101/88/5/2, folio 10]

The ship remained at Barbados from 19-29 October 1806, during which time there were 23 on the sick list all of which cured on board. Prior to going to the West Indies I procured every information from books and by enquiries from those who were conversant with the diseases of the climate, but could not get any satisfactory account how to act as some relied wholly in the use of mercury and others in Cinchona and the different authors I had consulted disagreed in their mode of treatment which was a source of great uneasiness to me not having been in the West Indies before. In Dr Crichton's publication he recommends Calomel, Opium and Antimony. Dr McLarty recommends Calomel to be given every hour and mercurial frictions, 3 times in the day. Dr Todd of Jamaica also uses mercurial frictions and calomel internally while the practice in most part of the French and other foreign Islands they trust much to the Cinchona. As Dr Rush's treatment is in great measure approved of by Dr Blane I resolved as soon as any case of fever should occur, after our arrival in the West Indies to follow as far as circumstances would permit and the case require his methods as the most simple laid down. [ADM 101/94/1/3, folios 24-25]

And a later one from a convict ship:

John Murphy, aged 45, Convict; disease or hurt, rheumatism. Put on sick list, 21 June 1834, at sea. Discharged, 4 July 1834. 'A native of the West Indies, a man of colour of a delicate habit of body very much emaciated, in his limbs particularly'. [ADM 101/74/10/1, folios 12-13]

Clearly the primary interest of the British Government will have been in its own West Indian dependencies and, post independence, in the Anglophone Caribbean. In this later period UK Government responsibility for relations with the independent states went first to the Commonwealth Relations Office, briefly to the Commonwealth Office, and finally, from 1968, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. But there has also been a continuing interest in other islands and mainland territories. Records of the Admiralty and War Office are, of course, important for military operations, and records of the Colonial Office include discrete collections relating to foreign dependencies temporarily under British control, as follows:

- Curaçao: four volumes of entry books from periods of British occupation 1800-2 and 1807-16 (CO 66)
- Guadeloupe: 25 volumes of correspondence, public accounts and shipping returns from periods of British occupation 1759-63, 1810-14 and 1815-16 (CO 110)
- Havana: 2 volumes of correspondence from the British expedition against the province in 1762/3 (CO 117)
- Martinique: 7 volumes of correspondence and shipping returns from periods of British occupation 1762-3, 1794-1802 and 1809-1815 (CO 166)
- St Croix: 10 volumes of correspondence and accounts, 1801-2 and 1808-15 (CO 244)
- St Eustatius: 1 bundle of papers, a considerable part of which consists of intercepted commercial correspondence, 1779-83 (CO 246)
- St Thomas: 6 volumes of précis of correspondence, 1808-5 (CO 259)
- Santo Domingo: 10 volumes of correspondence, accounts and miscellanea; various dates between 1693 and 1805 (CO 245)
- Suriname: 28 volumes of correspondence, accounts, shipping returns and returns of a census of population taken in 1811; various dates between 1667 and 1832 (CO 278)

Very few records of local colonial governments are held at TNA, but the British Guiana miscellanea series (CO 116) includes records of the Dutch West India Company relating to the administration of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice between 1686 and 1792.

Overall, however, the Foreign Office (1782-1968) had responsibility for managing the external relations of the United Kingdom and its dependencies, and the records of its network of diplomats and consular agents are included among the records of the Foreign Office itself at TNA.¹⁶ As noted above, clues as to its involvement in certain matters may be picked up in Colonial Office correspondence. Generally, Foreign Office records relating to foreign dependencies may be found under the name of the metropolitan power; correspondence from British consuls at Martinique and Guadeloupe is thus in the series FO 27, General Correspondence before 1906, France.¹⁷ Identifying such material dated prior to the late 1850s is complicated by the practice of listing it in the catalogue by the name of the consul, rather than the place of his posting. The *Foreign Office List*, published annually from 1852, gives particulars of staff of the Foreign Office and of the diplomatic and consular services and their postings, but the more general reference book to the staffing of Government

departments, the *Imperial Calendar*, which is available for earlier years, is far from comprehensive. The use of contemporary finding aids is thus essential, though it is important for all periods up to the 1950s.¹⁸ Major discussions relating to a foreign dependency may be found among correspondence from the diplomatic rather than consular service, for example in this case from the British ambassador at Paris. Independent territories have their own Foreign Office record series; so, for example, FO 35, Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, Haiti.

What has TNA done to improve access to records relating to the Caribbean? An early initiative was the publication of the indexed *Calendar of State Papers Colonial; America and West Indies* which provides transcripts or précis of documents in over 100 'CO' and other series. Its 45 volumes were published between 1860 and 1994, but the project was then abandoned, again because of the expense of proceeding. The *Calendar* thus covers the years 1574 to 1739 only, although the original intention was to cover the period to the American Revolution.¹⁹ Two commercial projects have made the *Calendar* more widely available. The first, a CDROM edition published by Routledge in 2000 is close to my heart as I provided one of three introductions and supervised the conversion of tens of thousands of obsolete document references, but I have to admit that its search facility is decidedly clunky. More recently Proquest has created an online, subscription, version which is not only easier to use but also incorporates images from one of the earliest of the record series included, CO 1, America and West Indies, Colonial Papers, 1574-1757. Other calendars were also compiled, for example to State Papers Domestic, Treasury Papers, the 'Colonial Acts' of the Privy Council, and the Journal of the Board of Trade. The Public Record Office series of 'Lists and Indexes' includes an *Alphabetical Guide to War Office and other Military Records* which references much colonial material.²⁰

Other edited collections of documents produced externally but in close collaboration with TNA include the volumes of the British Documents on the End of Empire Project (BDEEP) which published documents on the ending of colonial and associated rule and on the context in which this took place. One volume focuses on the short lived West Indies Federation.²¹

TNA produces a large number of 'research guides' which can be picked up in hard copy format at Kew, or down-loaded from the website. Those currently available which are of most obvious interest to the Caribbeanist are:

- America and the West Indies, transportation to, 1615-1776
- America and West Indies: Calendars of State Papers Colonial, 1574-1739
- America and the West Indies, Colonies before 1782
- Colonial Office: Advisory Committee
- Colonial Office: Registers of Correspondence, 1849-1926
- Colonial Office: Registers of Correspondence, 1926-1951
- Colonies and Dominions, Researching British
- Embassy and Consular Archives
- Foreign Office Records from 1782
- Foreign Office: Card Index, 1906-1910
- Foreign Office: Card Index, 1910-1919
- Government Gazettes of the British Empire and Commonwealth
- Imperial and Commonwealth History, Sources for
- Indian Indentured Labour, Family History Sources for
- Maps and Plans, Overseas Relations
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Abolition
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Acts of Parliament
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Britain and the Trade
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Emancipation
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Introduction
- Slave Trade, British Transatlantic: Slavery
- State Papers: Foreign

I understand that a series of regional guides is also planned. Many others will be of assistance if you need to venture into the records of departments such as the War Office, Treasury and many others.

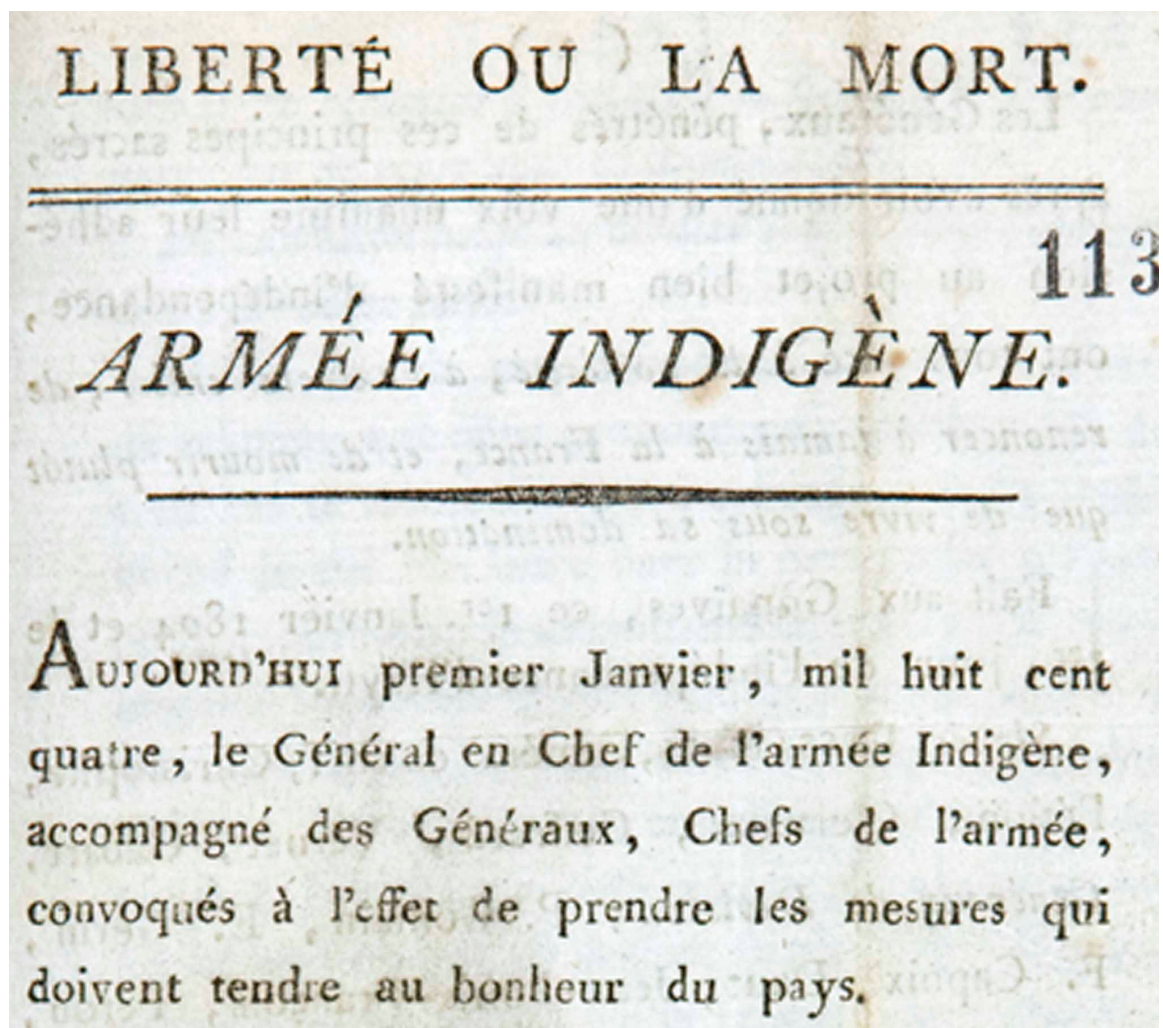
Although TNA now has something of a reputation for digitising documents, defined projects – generally although not always undertaken with commercial partners – tend to concentrate on ‘name rich’ sources such as military service records and to be targeted at the family history audience. This does not mean, however, that they are of no interest to others. The Royal Navy Registers of Seamen’s Services, 1853-1923, available through the ‘Documents

Online' area of the web site allow a search on place of birth (174 results for Barbados; 851 for Jamaica, although names will be duplicated in the case of men who served across the periods covered by two register series). A related source, 'Trafalgar ancestors', is part of an exhibition created to commemorate the bi-centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nelson/>), but can be used in the same way to find place of origin of those who served in the British fleet. I had no results with Barbados or Jamaica, but eleven men are listed as being born in the West Indies.

Another digitised and indexed resource of potential value is a collection of wills; as noted above, before 1858 when a civil procedure was introduced the Prerogative Court of Canterbury was responsible for proving wills of many Britons dying overseas. PCC wills are not searchable online through the catalogue, but they are through DocumentsOnline. A search in the 'place name' field using Barbados produces 519 hits, 27 of them for women. Some are the wills of military men suggesting they may have been very temporary residents. In many other cases occupations are not given but 71 are described as merchants and 17 as planters. There is a will for Sir James Leith, governor of Barbados from 1815 to 1816, who died there in office.

An important digitisation project of a very different type is the JISC funded collection of twentieth century Cabinet Papers.²² The 147 'Barbados' hits start with very different topics: a visit by Princess Margaret to the West Indies in 1955; the position of the sugar industry in the colonies in 1930; and cable communication with the West Indies in 1922.

In other cases individual documents may be made available digitally, often because a user has requested a digital copy, and sometimes because a new discovery has sparked wider interest. Recently TNA has publicised the discovery of a copy of Haiti's 1804 Declaration of Independence by an American graduate student.



[Extract from the Declaration, found in a volume of the Jamaica correspondence series CO 137/111 folios 113–117.²³ At time of writing the document, together with background information, can be seen via <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/453.htm>.]

TNA has created a number of online exhibitions, for example on the abolition of slavery and the British Empire, and one called 'Caribbean Histories Revealed' which came out of the Caribbean cataloguing project. There is a regular series of talks by staff and outside experts, most of which are now pod cast; there is a link from TNA's home page.

New records are continually deposited – most often those reaching the end of the usual 30-year closure period (which is due to be reduced gradually to 20 years²⁴). TNA publishes its criteria for the selection of Government records for permanent preservation in a series of documents known as operational selection policies, for example OSP 13, 'Britain's Diplomatic Relations, 1973-1996'.²⁵ (OSP 27 relates to the selection of Government

websites, held in the UK Government Web Archive.) But there are occasional deposits of older material. For example a collection of photographs from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, now in CO 1069, which includes items from the Caribbean such as CO 1069/388, ‘Saint Vincent and Martinique, Album containing photographs of damage caused by the 1898 hurricane in Saint Vincent and later general views, and of the 1902 volcanic eruption in Martinique that destroyed Saint Pierre.’ Another series of photographs which has been held at TNA for many years but adequately catalogued much more recently is the British Empire collection of about 8,000 photographs in the Central Office of Information series INF 10 (1945-1965). 240 relate to Barbados.

Many users of TNA and its predecessor have published invaluable material about the records. Clearly recent secondary studies will often provide short cuts into the records, but there are also much older, and to some minds old-fashioned, contributions which are likely to be ignored. I have recently been using Elizabeth Donnan’s selection of documents relating to the transatlantic slave trade, published as long ago as the 1930s but still the best introduction to the records of the African Companies held at TNA.²⁶

There is now a simpler opportunity for any user of TNA’s holdings to share their own knowledge of the records. *Your Archives* is a wiki, built using MediaWiki, the technology pioneered by Wikipedia online encyclopaedia. Users can contribute to *Your Archives* in numerous ways. You can:

- edit pre-existing pages
- submit your articles about historical subjects
- submit your articles about records held by The National Archives or elsewhere
- expand a catalogue entry
- publish a transcription of a document, including ones that are available on DocumentsOnline and other online services
- add information to build on TNA’s other resources such as the research guides and information given in the National Register of Archives
- use it as a workbook to store useful information discovered during your archival research
- collaborate with other users working on similar subjects or to work together on research projects

When I starting working on this paper the *Your Archives* home page featured my own brief article on the project ‘Your Caribbean Heritage’, a piece on the late Cy Grant referring to RAF and War Office documents held at TNA, and a transcript of a document relating to the pirate Captain William Kidd. But web pages change and featured articles now include one on the last legal slaving voyages. More significantly TNA has uploaded to *Your Archives* a considerable but selective listing of the British Guiana correspondence series CO 111 compiled by the Guyanese historian Sister M Noel Menezes. My former colleague Guy Grannum has recently been working on the Santo Domingo Claims Commission, and has posted his initial findings. In passing I would also mention Guy’s book *Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors* which has a wider application than its title suggests and is a useful introduction to records held both at TNA and in Caribbean national archives.²⁷ This is one of many books and articles written by TNA staff and often inspired by individual interests rather than being an official part of their duties.

A few points in conclusion:

- TNA’s catalogue is an enormously useful tool, but it is far from comprehensive, and sometimes difficult to use. Improvements in its usability are planned.
- The cataloguing project ‘Your Caribbean Heritage’ is continuing, partly with the use of volunteers recruited through one of TNA’s Caribbean family history days; progress is slow but if you are using one of the series of correspondence it is worth checking now and again if additional volumes have been completed.
- TNA is a government department. It has already been hit by cutbacks in the public service, resulting, for example, in the loss of posts and the reduction of open days from six per week to five. More cuts are, I think, inevitable.

¹ Mandy Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968: A Guide to the Records of the Colonial Office in The National Archives of the UK* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2008)

² T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558-1995* (Oxford, 1996), p. ix.

³ I use Barbados as an example throughout the paper for no particular reason; what I say is generally applicable to other British dependencies.

⁴ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/default.htm>

⁵ Records of a number of organisations, primarily the national museums and galleries but including the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the Post Office, are included in TNA’s catalogue but held by their creating bodies. The catalogue notes this.

⁶ It is often necessary to be aware of variant spellings. The catalogue picks up variations in some cases, but not all, so it is sensible to repeat searches using alternatives – easily done by using a Boolean search such as

‘Barbados OR Barbadoes’. Another Barbadian example is Bridgetown – also recorded as Bridge Town and Bridge-town - and not, of course, to be confused with the Bridgetown in Ireland (and possibly others?).

⁷ Just as the number of my ADM and CO hits varied from time to time, so some of these did not remain the same through subsequent searches.

⁸ Discrete collections of maps also exist, such as three series transferred from the Colonial Office Library; a selection of maps from various series has been catalogued in *Maps and Plans in the Public Record Office: 2. America and West Indies*, ed. P A Penfold (HMSO, 1974) as well as in the online catalogue. Other maps and plans remain uncatalogued and often undiscovered within bound volumes and files of correspondence and other papers.

⁹ One collection of six maps and drawings turns out to be of proposed fortifications at Trinidad. It comes up in the ‘Barbados’ search because each item was signed by the Commanding Royal Engineer at Barbados.

¹⁰ Some records of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, still the court of appeal for a number of former colonies in the Caribbean, are held separately in the PCAP series, but most remain with the Judicial Committee. Judgments from 1999 onwards can be found on its web site: <http://www.privy-council.org.uk>.

¹¹ postalheritage.org.uk/collections/archive

¹² Records of Kew Gardens are, as public records, included in TNA’s catalogue, but are held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Library and Archives. Collections of very different types also held at the Gardens are the Herbarium which holds seven million dried and preserved specimens documenting the identity of plants and fungi, and an economic botany collection illustrating the extent of human use of plants around the world.

¹³ An interesting form of the usual name; how many of us would search on ‘Santa Lucia’. This reference does not come up in a search on ‘St Lucia’ or ‘Saint Lucia’, and I would recommend just searching on ‘Lucia’ to ensure a comprehensive result, even though it may well prove too comprehensive and bring up references to persons or ships called Lucia.

¹⁴ In the case of the Colonial Office project from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and for ADM 101 from the Wellcome Trust.

¹⁵ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/research/news.htm>

¹⁶ Earlier records are in a variety of State Papers Foreign series (SP).

¹⁷ This and other individual country series for the pre-1906 period are continued in FO 371, Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966.

¹⁸ For details see Michael Roper, *The Records of the Foreign Office, 1782-1968* (Public Record Office, 2002) and Louise Atherton, *Never Complain, Never Explain: Records of the Foreign Office and the State Paper Office 1500-c.1960* (Public Record Office, 1994). The latter includes well-explained guidance on how to use the registers and indexes to Foreign Office correspondence.

¹⁹ A separate series of catalogues exists for that period: K.G. Davies (eds), *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783* (Irish University Press, 1972-1981)

²⁰ PRO Lists and Indexes Vol LIII, 1931: Kraus reprint, 1963

²¹ S. R. Ashton and David Killingray (eds.), *The West Indies, British Documents on the End of Empire Series B Volume 6* (The Stationery Office, 1999)

²² <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>

²³ CO 137 is included in the cataloguing undertaken by ‘Your Caribbean Heritage’; unfortunately we started in 1805, this document was found in an 1804 volume.

²⁴ <http://www.30yearrulereview.org.uk>

²⁵ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/osp13.pdf>

²⁶ Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the Slave Trade to America* (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 4 vols., 1930-1935)

²⁷ Public Record Office, 2002