

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES FOR UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS OF THESES IN COMMONWEALTH HISTORY

The main official, unpublished, sources for original research on Imperial and Commonwealth history are located in London:

- In the National Archives in Kew (west London) for the Empire and Commonwealth apart from India.
- In the British Library, the records for British rule in India by the East India Company (to 1858) and then under the Crown. [These are known as the India Office Library and Records as they used to be housed in their own building.]

These collections are very large and it is advisable to discuss their use with someone who has already worked in them. There are published guides to these collections which are also most useful: eg. A. Thurston *Records of the Colonial Office, Dominions Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and Commonwealth Office*; Martin Moir, *A General Guide to the India Office Records*. Somewhat broader is M.D. Wainwright & N. Matthews, *A Guide to Western Manuscripts and Documents in the British Isles Relating to South and South East Asia*. On Africa see French, T. (ed.), *The SCOLMA directory of libraries and special collections on Africa in the United Kingdom and in Europe* (London, 1993); Pearson, J. D. (ed.), *A guide to manuscripts and documents in the British Isles relating to Africa* (London, 1993–1994); Thurston, A. (ed.), *Guide to archives and manuscripts relating to Kenya and East Africa in the United Kingdom* (London, 1991); Zell, H. M., *The African studies companion. A resource guide & directory* (Lochcarron, 2003).

(Before going to either of these major archives check on admission procedures: these normally include obtaining a reader's ticket with the evidence of your University card and a letter from a tutor.)

Apart from official manuscript sources there are also the "private papers" of many colonial governors and officials. These are located in many different archives, often depending on the wish of the family and executors concerned. The India Office Library and Records has, for example, the papers of many viceroys and provincial governors. The papers of Lord Harding (viceroy, 1910–16), however, are in Cambridge University Library; whereas the papers of Lord Hailey, whose career spanned India and Africa, are divided between the IOLR (for Indian material) and Rhodes House Library, Oxford (for African material). The papers of many lesser colonial officials were collected after the end of empire and these are available in the IOLR (for India) and in Rhodes House.

(If you are interested in specific people consult the hand lists and websites of these major record collections, your tutor or specialist advisor, or look carefully in the footnotes and lists of sources of published works near the topic which interests you.)

Colonial rule also generated runs of valuable published material which are important sources for historians. These included decennial Censuses, gazetteers, and administration reports on a whole range of governmental activities such as taxation or education.

Specific problems occurring in different parts of the empire were also dealt with by means of different sorts of commissions of enquiry, including Royal Commissions. Many of these were published as parliamentary papers or "Blue Books" with Command numbers for identification. Because these deal with significant issues or events they can often be an excellent starting point for a thesis. These are available in many places, including the Bodleian and the University Library, Cambridge.

Hansard is also an important source for Parliamentary debates on imperial issues.

Oxford is particularly well endowed with two Libraries which hold many of the runs of original printed material relating to empire (as well as superb collections of secondary material) – Rhodes House Library (for material concerning places other than India), and the Indian Institute Library (for Indian material). Rhodes House Library also holds a significant range of manuscript material relating to individuals and organizations and for many thesis-writers should be the first port of call for original material. (Among the mss. materials it holds are the papers of the Anti-Apartheid movement, of the Anti-slavery and Aborigines Protections Society, of the Fabian Society, those of Sir Roy Welensky, Arthur Creech-Jones, Lord Lugard, Dame Margery Pelham; it also holds the archive of the Anglican missionary society, the USPG, which worked around the empire.)

The Library of Queen Elizabeth House on St. Giles also holds good secondary material on development issues within the Empire and Commonwealth, as well as some original material – particularly pamphlets etc.

Archives of missionary societies:

Secular historians are beginning to learn the value of the records of the major missionary societies which worked within the British Empire and often continued their work after the end of Empire. The two major Anglican Missionary societies were the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) which combined the earlier Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), and the Church Missionary society (CMS). The USPG archive is located in Oxford in the Rhodes House Library. The CMS archive is housed in the Birmingham University Library. Others included the records of the Baptist Missionary Society (held in Regents Park College) and of smaller nonconformist societies held in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

(As in the case of the secular archives check on admission requirements; CMS archives require a letter of recommendation from an established scholar.)

NB further information can be found on the following websites:

Archives Hub (...access to the archives of UK universities and colleges)

<http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk/>

PRO Kew

<http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk/>

Published Collections of Source Material:

There are also some excellent published collections of source material, particularly for the closing years of imperial rule: eg

The British Documents on the End of Empire Series (3 series arranged by area and topic)

Series B contains the documents arranged by country:

Vol. 1: R. Rathbone (ed.), *Ghana* (London, 1992).

Vol. 2: K. M. De Silva (ed.), *Sri Lanka* (London, 1997)

Vol. 3: A. J. Stockwell (ed.), *Malaya* (London, 1995).

Vol. 4: J. Kent (ed.), *Egypt* (London, 1998)

Vol. 5: D. H. Johnson (ed.), *Sudan* (London 1998)

Vol. 6: S.R. Ashton and D. Killingray (ed.), *West Indies* (London, 1999)

Vol. 7: M. Lynn (ed.), *Nigeria* (London, 2001)

The Transfer of Power Series on India 1942–7 (12 volumes arranged chronologically)

The papers of some prominent colonial nationalist politicians are also a major published resource: for example on India there are *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, as well as collections of papers relating to less prominent politicians such as G.B. Pant, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad. (All these on India are available in the Indian Institute Library.) See also autobiographies by prominent Colonial politicians and nationalist activists.