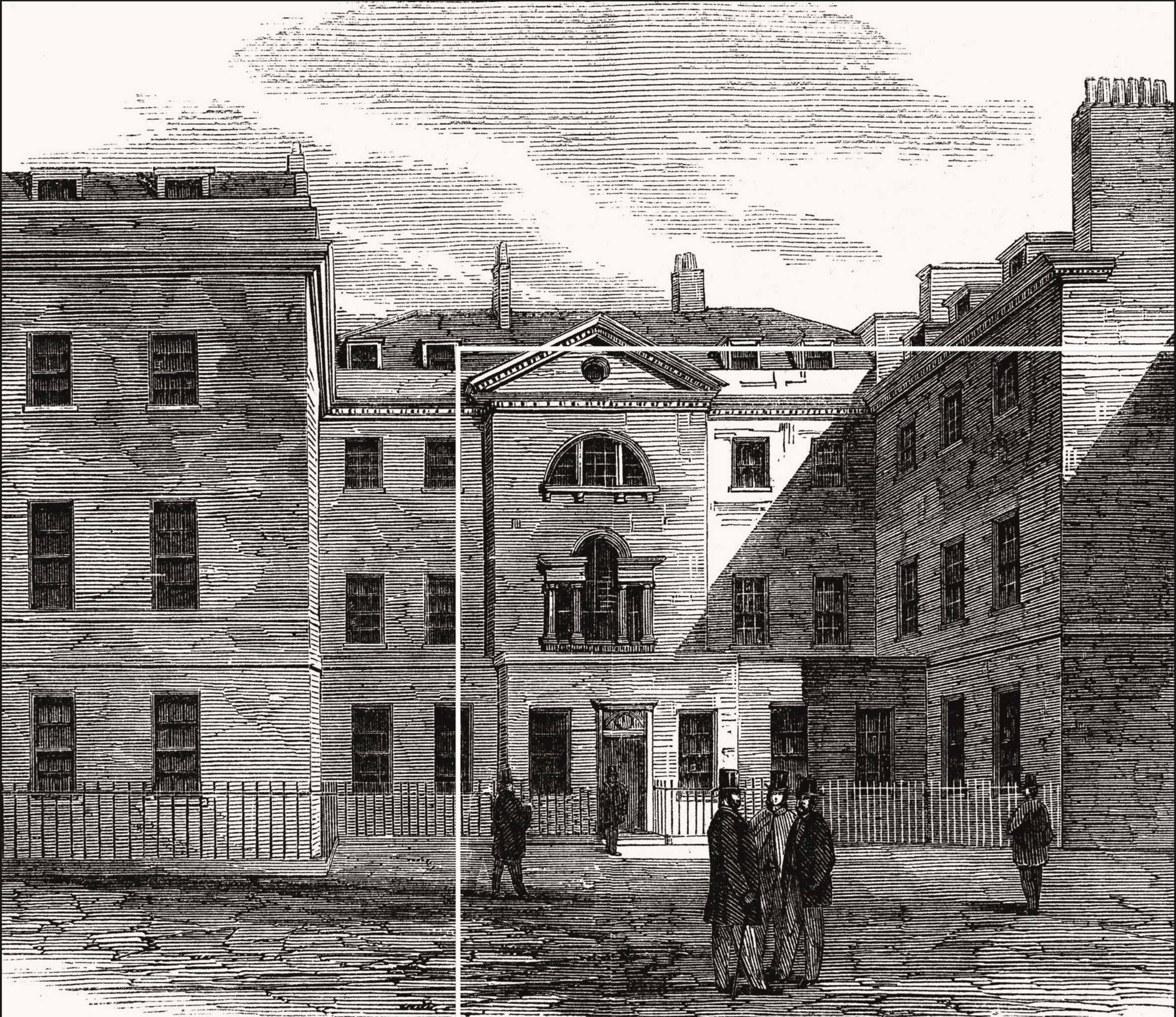

Keith Hamilton

SERVANTS OF DIPLOMACY

A Domestic History of the Victorian Foreign Office

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To Kathy
for putting up with this and me

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Preface

This book is about the Foreign Office. It is not about foreign policy. Nor for that matter does it have much to say about such traditional diplomatic skills as negotiation, reporting and representation. Rather, it is concerned with individuals who, though they served the needs of diplomacy, were not generally accepted as part of the Office's regular clerical establishment. Amongst these were the department's domestic servants, its archivists and librarians, and its home and foreign service messengers. They were functionaries with whose histories I became more familiar when thirty years ago I left academe to join what was then the Historical Branch of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO's) Library and Records Department (since renamed FCO Historians). A request for a brief history of the Librarian's Department and my later involvement in editing and contributing to a collection of essays on the suppression of the slave trade further stimulated my interest in those who, like the clerks of the Slave Trade Department, enjoyed neither the grading nor the career prospects of their colleagues in the Office's geopolitical divisions. There were also, it seemed, tales about accommodation and working conditions in Victorian Whitehall which deserved an airing. Retirement offered me the opportunity to explore these further. But what began as a recreational romp through the archives has since veered towards a more detailed examination of the impact of administrative reform, technological advances and an expanding diplomatic agenda upon the ranking, remuneration and responsibilities of specialist and subordinate staff. The result has been a sort of bottom-up history of those in the Foreign Office's employ who lived and laboured not just below stairs, but upstairs, on the stairs and down the road.

Much of what follows is based upon Crown Copyright documents available at the National Archives, Kew, which I have cited and quoted from in accordance with the Open Government Licence. With the kind cooperation of Professor Patrick Salmon, the FCO's chief historian, I have likewise drawn upon the records of the Librarian's Department of the Foreign Office. I am also grateful to the staff of the British Library for assisting my access to the Aberdeen, Canning, Ellis, Granville and Hardwicke Papers in its possession; to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for facilitating my use of the Clarendon Papers in its custody and possession; and to the London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, for granting permission to reference correspondence in its Willoughby Maycock Collection. My thanks are no less due to the Deputy Keeper of the Records, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, for permission to cite and quote from the Lenox-Conyngham and Pakenham Papers; to the archivists of the University of Southampton in respect of the Broadlands Papers; to the present Lord Malmesbury in respect of the papers of the 3rd Earl of Malmesbury in the custody of Hampshire Record Office; and to Elizabeth Dunn of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and

Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, who responded so promptly to my request for a copy of correspondence in the John Backhouse Papers.

Finally, I should like to thank my former colleagues at FCO Historians for their assistance and forbearance, particularly Richard Smith, on whom I have inflicted too many of my chapter drafts for comment and correction, and Nevil Hagon, who has sought out and retrieved printed works unavailable elsewhere. I am also indebted to Professor Geoff Berridge of the University of Leicester for his advice, and to Michael Kandiah of the Department of Political Economy, King's College London, Alastair Noble of the Ministry of Defence's Air Historical Branch, and two other friends, Effie Pedaliu and Jimmy Athanassiou, for their encouragement and support. All errors of fact and interpretation are, of course, my own.

Keith Hamilton
St Vitus's Day, 2020

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
DU	Duke University
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
GER	Great Eastern Railway
GPO	General Post Office
HC	House of Commons
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
LD	Librarian's Department (Foreign Office)
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
PRO	Public Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
TNA	The National Archives
UoS	University of Southampton

Introduction

An office of class and classification

The staff of the Foreign Office consists of a Secretary of State, two Under-Secretaries of State, one of whom is a permanent officer, while the other is changeable with each successive Administration; an Assistant Under-Secretary of State, who is also a permanent officer; and Clerks in their several classes.

Foreign Office memorandum, 11 December 1869[1]

You have got three social classes apparently at the Foreign Office.

Robert William Hanbury (Conservative MP), 13 November 1889[2]

The secretary of state, his undersecretaries and their clerks were far from being the sole occupants of the nineteenth-century Foreign Office. As servants of the Crown they themselves were served by individuals, some whose duties were administrative and intellectual, and others whose labours were primarily domestic and mechanical. The department's full establishment thus included librarians, who acted as archivists, publicists and researchers; translators of foreign languages; and bookbinders and printers of official correspondence and parliamentary papers. There were also porters and home and foreign service messengers; housekeepers, their maidservants, charladies and cooks; door- and office-keepers; coal porters and lamplighters; and in the latter half of the century these were joined by telegraph clerks, typists and telephonists. In the 1900s there must even have been a bartender, though he or she was not officially so designated. Two of the Office's librarians, Lewis Hertslet and his son, Edward, are through their published works already well known to diplomatic historians, and the messengers, more especially those who braved the hazards of continental travel in times of war and revolution, have figured in memoirs and recollections and been the subject of at least two substantial monographs.[3] Yet, despite there being no lack of documentary sources, little has been written about the Office's domestic staff, who, while they functioned within a diplomatic milieu,

1 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Librarian's Department (LD), General (Gen.), Foreign Office (FO), Organisation, Discipline, etc., 1844-1932, memo. respecting the System under which the Business of the British Foreign Office is conducted, 11 December 1869.

2 *Fourth Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Civil Establishments in the Different Offices of State at Home and Abroad* (c 6172) (London, 1890), minutes, para. 26,660.

3 V. Wheeler-Holohan, *The History of the King's Messengers* (New York, 1934); and P. Scott Cady, *The English Royal Messengers Service, 1685–1750: An Institutional Study* (Lewiston, 1999).

seemed sometimes to belong more to the world fictionalized by Dickens than to that which Castlereagh and Canning helped shape. The department's housekeeper and its senior officekeeper had managerial responsibilities and were by the standards of their day adequately accommodated and rewarded. They were, however, clearly a class apart from the undersecretaries and clerks. So likewise, the librarian and his assistants, though central to the business of the Office, were considered specialists with specific records-related duties, and they were never properly accepted as part of the regular clerical establishment. And the King's (later Queen's) Messengers, who until the 1850s fell under the librarian's superintendence and upon whom two other secretaries of state also depended for the safe delivery of their correspondence, were frequently beset by disputes over their occupational and social status.

Historians, foremost amongst them Valerie Cromwell, Ray Jones, C. R. Middleton, Keith Neilson, T. G. Otte and Zara Steiner, have already examined in detail the transformation of the Foreign Office from a coterie of scribes into a modern policymaking and managing elite. This work focuses not upon the higher echelons of the Office, but upon the librarians, the messengers and those more generally classed as the department's subordinate staff. Their working lives cannot, however, be understood without first reviewing briefly the bureaucracy they served and its evolution in response to the expansion of diplomacy, the exigencies of war and peacemaking, and the requirements of a reform-minded Treasury and seemingly penny-pinching politicians. Like the Home Office, the Foreign Office only emerged as a separate government department in 1782. Throughout most of the eighteenth century the administration of Britain's external relations was geographically divided between two secretaries of state, one each for the Northern and Southern Department, both of whom had additional domestic administrative responsibilities. King George III's desire for greater efficiency in government, Parliament's quest for economy, inter-ministerial rivalry, and the abolition of the office of secretary of state for the colonies in the wake of Britain's defeat by French and American forces at Yorktown in October 1781 seem to have finally occasioned structural change.[4] In any event, on 29 March 1782 the radical Whig politician Charles James Fox despatched a circular to British envoys abroad which announced that following the resignation of Lord Stormont, the secretary of state for the Northern Department, the king had appointed Fox as one of 'His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State', and at the same time had made a 'new arrangement in the Departments by conferring that for Domestick Affairs and the Colonies on the Earl of Shelburne, and entrusting me with the sole Direction of the Department for Foreign Affairs'.[5] His office, situated in the premises of the former Northern Department in Cleveland Row, St James's, was by later standards a very small affair, made up of two undersecretaries, one of whom was Fox's political ally, the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan; a chief clerk; seven senior and junior clerks; two chamber- or office-keepers;

[4] C. R. Middleton, *The Administration of British Foreign Policy, 1782–1846* (Durham, 1977), p. 10.

[5] British Library (BL), Hardwicke Papers, Add. MS 35525, Fox to Sir Robert M. Keith, despt. No. 1, 29 March 1782. R. R. Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782–1801* (Durham, 1969), pp. 4–7.

and a housekeeper and her maid- and man-servants. To these were added during the next four years two more clerks, a doorkeeper and an office porter.[6]

The Foreign Office was subsequently relocated, first in September 1786 to the site of the Old Cockpit in Whitehall and then in December 1793 to houses leased on, and adjoining, the south side of Downing Street. There it remained until 1861 when for seven years it was housed temporarily in Whitehall Gardens while awaiting the completion of the north-west corner of George Gilbert Scott's new public offices in Whitehall, a multi-departmental entity the whole of which now constitutes the Main Building of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.[7] Institutionally distinct from the country's diplomatic service, the department's business, as defined by Jeremy Sneyd, its first chief clerk, was that of conducting 'correspondence with all Foreign Courts, negotiating with the Ambassadors or Ministers of all the Foreign Courts in Europe, as well as of the United States of America', making and receiving applications and representations to and from them, and corresponding with other departments of state.[8] The supervision of this work was the primary function of the undersecretaries. Usually there were two, but between 1783 and 1789 there was only one, and during two brief periods in the 1820s there were three. In time it became customary to replace just one of the undersecretaries on a change of ministry and the longest-serving was considered senior. Nevertheless, while senior undersecretaries, such as Joseph Planta (1817–27), assumed increasing responsibility for official arrangements, they were slow to claim permanence, and it was only following John Backhouse's appointment in 1827 that the term 'permanent under-secretary' came gradually into use. Backhouse's impermanent colleagues were political appointees, and as spokesmen for the Office in the Commons in an age when foreign secretaries sat almost exclusively in the Lords, they were eventually labelled 'parliamentary'. Meanwhile, under Backhouse and his successor, a former envoy to Spain, Henry Unwin 'Pumpy' Addington (1842–54), the authority of the permanent undersecretary over senior staff in matters of departmental organization was clearly established.[9] Addington, the nephew of the Tory statesman Lord Sidmouth, was unduly pessimistic when in December 1845 he questioned whether 'as a Gentleman' he could remain undersecretary if his friend, the foreign secretary Lord Aberdeen, were succeeded by his erstwhile critic, Lord Palmerston.[10] But it was not until Edmund Hammond's tenure (1854–73) that the permanent undersecretary began to assume more of an advisory function, with the incumbent very often single-handedly directing the current business of the Office. Later appointees, Lord Tenterden

[6] J. M. Collinge (ed.), *Office Holders in Modern Britain*, vol. 8, *Foreign Office Officials 1782–1870* (London, 1979), pp. 17–18, 50–4.

[7] S. Foreman, *From Palace to Power: An Illustrated History of Whitehall* (Brighton, 1995), pp. 76–82.

[8] V. Cromwell, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World* (London, 1982), ed. Z. Steiner, pp. 541–73.

[9] Middleton, *Administration*, pp. 123–50. See also: Middleton, 'John Backhouse and the Origins of the Permanent Undersecretaryship for Foreign Affairs: 1828–1842', *Journal of British Studies*, xiii/2 (1974), pp. 24–45.

[10] Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Pakenham Papers, MIC 537/4, T3763/H/15/19, Addington to R. Pakenham, letter, 2 December 1845. Palmerston had been particularly critical of Addington when he was previously British minister in Madrid. University of Southampton (UoS), Broadlands Papers., PP/GC/CA/259, Palmerston to Stratford Canning, letter, 24 May 1833.

(1873–82), Sir Julian Pauncefote (1882–9), Sir Philip Currie (1889–93) and Sir Thomas Sanderson (1894–1906), made what they wanted of the post. The next two, Sir Charles Hardinge (1906–10 and 1916–20) and Sir Arthur Nicolson (1910–16), were career diplomats. The former gained credit from the implementation of reforms initiated by his predecessor, while the latter struggled with their consequences. They all presided over a continuing expansion in the workload of the Office and concomitant changes in its structure and procedures. Thus, in 1858 James Murray was promoted to the new post of assistant undersecretary, and in 1874, prior to his succeeding Tenterden, Pauncefote was appointed legal assistant undersecretary. By 1895 the Office had three assistant undersecretaries, each exercising a supervisory role over the clerks in their administrative and political departments.[11]

Those who made up the clerical staff of 'Mr Fox's Office' were for the most part little more than amanuenses. Only the first of their number, the chief clerk, had duties which allowed him to play a significant role in the overall administration of the Office. He was responsible for the department's finances: he oversaw its accounts, initially collecting revenues from fees levied for the signing of warrants and the securing of commissions for diplomats and consuls, and from these paying the personnel. But in this capacity, Sneyd's successors, though often instrumental in domestic and disciplinary matters, became increasingly remote from the political business of the Office, heading a division whose clerical employees were specially recruited and more skilled in bookkeeping than diplomacy.[12] The adoption of new Treasury auditing procedures in 1866 led to a thorough reorganization of its staffing, and by 1881 the then chief clerk, Francis Alston, had under him no less than ten designated clerks.[13] As for the other clerks, those of the regular establishment, their work was largely confined to managing the Office's correspondence: copying, ciphering, registering, seeking out and making fair drafts of despatches and other papers. Their formal hours of employment were hardly onerous. In the 1790s their presence was required from 11.00 am till 4.00 pm (put back in 1822 to 12.00 noon to 5.00 pm) daily, and on foreign-post nights till 8.00 pm or until business was complete. They could, nevertheless, be kept at their desks late into the evening, especially during Palmerston's tenure as foreign secretary in the 1830s and 1840s, and they could not escape the need to work at home before the Office opened. Indeed, a considerable increase in paperwork during the latter part of the Napoleonic Wars resulted in the appointment of more of their number and a reordering of the establishment, so that, despite parliamentary appeals for retrenchment, in 1822 the Office included four senior clerks, four second-class clerks, six third-class or junior clerks, and three supernumeraries.[14] Even then the Office was clearly understaffed to

[11] V. Cromwell and Z. Steiner, 'The Foreign Office before 1914: A Study in Resistance', *Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth-Century Government* (London, 1972), ed. G. Sutherland, pp. 167–94. On the office of permanent undersecretary and its holders see: Keith Neilson and T. G. Otte, *The Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854–1946* (Abingdon, 2009).

[12] Middleton, *Administration*, pp. 154–7. J. Tilley, *London to Tokyo* (London, 1942), pp. 79–80.

[13] R. Jones, *The Nineteenth-Century Foreign Office: An Administrative History* (London, 1971), pp. 95–101.

[14] Middleton, *Administration*, pp. 179–81.

cope with a trebling in consular and diplomatic correspondence between 1825 and 1840.[15]

The clerks, whose promotion was most usually, though not invariably, on the basis of seniority rather than merit, gradually began to work under one or other of the undersecretaries, and then only on correspondence relating to specific countries or groups of countries. Thus, by the 1850s the Office already had five geopolitical departments, headed by senior clerks and with four of them under the supervision of the permanent undersecretary. In 1882 these were reduced to three: the Western (Europe), the Eastern (Europe) and the American and Asiatic Departments. The first recognizable divisions were, however, like the Chief Clerk's Department, administrative rather than political.[16] They also tended to draw their employees from outside the regular establishment. The Librarian's Department, essentially the Office's records division, might be said to have come into existence with the appointment in 1801 of Richard Ancell, formerly a clerk in the State Paper Office, as librarian. But since the department then consisted of no more than Ancell and his teenage assistant, it was in the first instance hardly a department at all. Even in 1839 there were, besides the librarian, only his deputy and a clerk. Likewise, the Slave Trade Department, which managed the correspondence relating to British efforts to suppress the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, emerged in piecemeal fashion under James Bandinel. He was promoted to a senior clerkship in 1822, but his department, which by 1830 was the largest single division of the Office under a senior clerk, was considered a temporary expedient, and until 1854 its staff were, along with those in the Librarian's Department, recruited on inferior pay scales and with poorer prospects of promotion than their established colleagues.[17] Another branch, the Treaty and Royal Letter Department, which was formally created in 1825 and which prepared treaties for ratification and presentation to Parliament, was similarly headed by a senior clerk, aided until 1841 by a non-established assistant. By contrast, the Consular Department, which was formed following Parliament's reorganization of the consular service in 1825, was headed by the first of the senior clerks, John Bidwell Sr., with a clerk of the regular establishment as his assistant. Four decades later, in 1866, the department, which had by then acquired what the Treasury termed a supplemental or supplementary clerk for the registering and keeping of its papers, was merged with the newly established Commercial Department. Further administrative permutations would see it united with the Slave Trade Department and included in 1883 in a renamed Consular and African Department.[18]

[15] K. Bourne, 'The Foreign Office under Palmerston', *The Foreign Office 1782–1982* (Frederick, MD, 1984), ed. R. Bullen, pp. 19–45.

[16] Z. Steiner, 'The Old Foreign Office: From Secretarial Office to Modern Department of State', *Publications de l'Ecole Française de Rome* (1981), pp. 177–95.

[17] K. Hamilton, 'Zealots and Helots: The Slave Trade Department of the Nineteenth-Century Foreign Office', *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807–1975* (Brighton, 2009), eds. K. Hamilton and P. Salmon, pp. 20–41.

[18] Middleton, *Administration*, pp. 193–201. Jones, *Foreign Office*, pp. 84–94. Hamilton, 'Zealots and Helots', pp. 30–6. T. G. Otte, '"A Kind of Black Hole"? Commercial Diplomacy before 1914', *The Foreign Office: Commerce and British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2016), eds. J. Fisher, E. G. H. Pedaliu and R. Smith, pp. 25–68.

During the first half-century of its existence, reforms instituted at the Foreign Office may, as Charles Middleton has argued, have been 'almost always the direct result of pressures within the department'.[19] Yet, developments in other government departments were bound to affect those in the Foreign Office's employ. In 1782 the King's Messengers served the home and foreign secretaries. War with France led in 1794 to the appointment of a third secretary of state, and from 1795 the messengers attended all three of their respective offices. Then in 1801 the War Office assumed responsibility for Britain's overseas possessions and, following the restoration of peace in 1814–15 and the consequential shift in the department's administrative focus, it was as colonial secretary rather than as secretary of state for war that in 1824 Lord Bathurst participated in the restructuring of the messenger corps. Located in adjacent houses at the western end of Downing Street, the occupants of the Colonial Office shared with their close neighbours the deficiencies of shoddily built properties, designed for family rather than official life.[20] However, of far greater significance for the staff of both offices was the rise of the Treasury as the department through which Parliament oversaw government expenditure and which emerged as a primary instrument of change and restraint in the management and organization of public services. Through its participation in interdepartmental committees of enquiry, the Treasury sought to influence the composition and workings of other offices, promoting conformity in matters such as pay, pensions and recruitment. Perhaps the best known of these Treasury-inspired interventions were those associated with the report completed in November 1853 by Sir Stafford Northcote, a former legal secretary to the Board of Trade, and Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Treasury's assistant secretary. A reformist manifesto, it advocated recruitment by open examination, the establishment of a unified home civil service, promotion by merit and the introduction of a hierarchy of grades separating mechanical from intellectual endeavour.[21] While such ideas had little immediate impact on the Foreign Office's domestic servants, their application worked to the disadvantage of a messenger service still adjusting to the pressures of the railway age, and eventually furnished the under-appreciated clerks of the Librarian's Department with grounds for pressing, albeit with only limited success, for redress and promotion.

Prior to the publication of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report and the introduction of competitive examinations for entrants to the Foreign Office, appointments were usually determined more by patronage than proven ability. Thereafter, candidates for examination still had to be nominated by the foreign secretary, and the successful ones joined a tight-knit clerical establishment drawn in large part from the upper ranks of society.[22] Yet, despite John Bright's oft-cited jibe that the British foreign policy was

[19] Middleton, *Administration*, p. 154.

[20] D. M. Young, *The Colonial Office in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1961), pp. 8–22, 124–7.

[21] HC. *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service* (London, 1854). M. Wright, *Treasury Control of the Civil Service 1854-1874* (Oxford, 1969), pp. xii–xvii; 'Treasury Control 1854-1914', Sutherland (ed.), *Studies*, pp. 195–226.

[22] Jones, *Foreign Office*, pp. 41–64; and 'The Social Structure of the British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914', *Histoire Sociale-Social History*, xiv/27 (1981), pp. 49–66. Z. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 16–20; and 'Elitism and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Office before the Great War', *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939*

'neither more nor less than a gigantic system of out-door relief for the aristocracy', some of the key figures in the early nineteenth-century Office came from families which were not so much landed as moneyed and/or well connected.[23] They were what one historian has aptly described as of the 'middling sort'.[24] Backhouse, the son of a Liverpool merchant, was already in George Canning's service when Canning was for a second time appointed foreign secretary in 1822; Bandinel, whose family was of Italian origin, was the son of a clergyman and brother of the librarian at the Bodleian in Oxford; Thomas Bidwell Sr., his son Thomas and his nephew and great-nephew, all four of whom rose to prominent positions, had filial links with a Norfolk brewing family; and Lewis Hertslet, the first of another Office dynasty, was the son of a Swiss migrant who had gained employment as a King's Messenger. Others were of more elevated pedigree. Edward Schencker Scheener, who transferred to the Foreign Office from the government's Audit Office in 1807, was the illegitimate son of the Duke of Kent and therefore a nephew of Kings George IV and William IV and a half-brother to Queen Victoria.[25] His career in the Office was marred by a long-standing dispute over his pay and grading, and much to the distress of his colleagues, he proved to be both literally and metaphorically a right royal bastard.[26] In February 1826, having claimed to be the victim of an intrigue to oust him from his post, he clashed openly with a future chief clerk, George Lenox-Conyngham. The latter, a one-legged and fiery Ulsterman, had been crippled some years earlier when, after mounting a coach at Charing Cross, his loaded gun had slipped and discharged its shot into his left thigh.[27] His disability did not, however, prevent him from offering an impetuous Scheener 'satisfaction at a moment's notice'. Scheener responded by spitting in his challenger's face, and the ensuing affray ended with Scheener seizing Lenox-Conyngham's cane, breaking it across his knee, and tossing it in the fire. Canning subsequently directed that Scheener abstain from attending the Foreign Office until further notice, and in 1830, despite the best efforts of his uncle, the heir to the throne, to save him from further ruin, he was compulsorily retired.[28]

(Edmonton, Alberta, 1984), eds. B. J. C. McKercher and D. J. Moss, pp. 19–55. T. G. Otte, '"Outdoor Relief for the Aristocracy"? European Nobility and Diplomacy, 1850-1914', *The Diplomats' World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 2008), eds. Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte, pp. 23–57.

23 Speech by Bright on 29 October 1858. *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy of John Bright, M.P.* (2 vols, London, 1869), ed. James E. Thorold Rogers, vol. 2, p. 382.

24 J. Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy: Britain in Europe, c. 1750-1830* (Manchester, 2011), p. 3.

25 In a letter which begins with the salutation 'My Dear Lord' and which was probably addressed to the prime minister, Lord Liverpool, the Duke of Clarence, the future King William IV, wrote that he was 'anxious for the welfare of that Mr Scheener as he is the natural son of the Duke of Kent'. BL, Ellis Papers, Add. Ms 41315, letter from Clarence, 12 August 1823.

26 On one occasion Canning declared that 'he would rather write and copy every despatch in the Office in his own hand, than employ any longer in confidential services an Individual so wrong-headed, of a nature so suspicious, and of a temper so ungovernable, as Mr. Scheener's whole correspondence and conduct . . . has shewn him to be'. J. Tilley and S. Gaselee, *The Foreign Office* (London, 1933), p. 45.

27 E. Hertslet, *Recollections of the Old Foreign Office* (London, 1901), p. 143.

28 E. Scheener, *Statement of Facts Most Respectfully Submitted to His Majesty's Government 3rd Nov. 1830* (London, 1830). TNA, FO 366/672, depositions at Bow St. Magistrates' Court of Lenox-Conyngham and Scheener, 21 February 1826; minute by Canning, 22 February 1826. FO 366/673, Aberdeen to Treasury, letter, 29 March 1830.

Lenox-Conyngham denounced his assailant as a 'damned scoundrel and a disgrace to the Office and the character of a Gentleman'.[29] Being a gentleman mattered. When in October 1823 an unsatisfactory junior clerk sought transfer to a consulate, Planta urged Canning to 'give us a real good *Gentleman* to fill his place in the office'.[30] Planta, himself the son of the British Museum's principal librarian, may possibly have hoped for someone of noble lineage. Yet, by the 1820s the status of 'gentleman' had been generally extended to all those above the rank of common tradesmen whose intelligence, manners and refinement allowed them to enjoy the company of educated society. No less important was the possession of means with which to support a lifestyle commensurate with one's social standing.[31] Even those of the Foreign Office's subordinate staff, who were considered the equivalent of servants of gentlemen and who clearly ranked above the coal porters, charladies and their like, were expected to maintain a certain decorum. The graduated salaries, first introduced in 1795, were not, however, reckoned in themselves sufficiently generous to meet this purpose, and employees of the Office boosted their incomes from a variety of supplementary sources, taking on additional paid duties and responsibilities.[32] Lewis Hertslet turned such jobbing into a fine art, thereby expanding his own and his family's fortune. He thus profited considerably from acting as a financial agent for the messengers he subsequently superintended, and in 1824 he was able to transfer his agency work and accompanying benefits to his brother James, who on retirement passed them on to Lewis's son Edward.

Other clerks collaborated in a similar fashion, acting as private agents for British diplomats, consuls and other representatives of the Office overseas. Thomas Staveley, an otherwise impecunious official, joined with Lenox-Conyngham in what he dubbed 'our firm', and during the 1830s he was thereby able to negotiate a £500 bank loan on the security of his prospective agency receipts.[33] The system, which involved home-based staff managing the accounts of those serving abroad in return for a fee of one per cent of the salaries and outfit allowances of diplomatic clients and a flat annual charge for other customers, was much criticized in Parliament and the press, and under Treasury pressure was abolished in 1870.[34] That it was open to abuse was made only too apparent when, in September 1853, it was discovered that over a period of eighteen months two clerks in the Slave

[29] Ibid. H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827: England, the Neo-Holy Alliance and the New World* (London, 1925), pp. 262–3.

[30] BL, Canning Papers, Add. Ms 89143/2/7/2, Planta to Canning, letter, 23 October 1823. Emphasis in original. Hammond likewise required his clerks to be 'gentlemen by birth and habits and feelings'. M. Anderson, 'Edmund Hammond, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1854-1873', PhD thesis, University of London, 1955, p. 190.

[31] As one author argues, 'It was in the 19th century that the concept [of gentleman] came to be so all-embracing and so demanding and took on with much greater strength its moral overtones.' P. Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London, 1993), p. 12.

[32] Middleton, *Administration*, pp. 161–4.

[33] PRONI, Lenox-Conyngham Papers, T3161/5/1, Staveley to Lenox-Conyngham, letters, 7 August 1831 and 14 February 1837; Lenox-Conyngham to Staveley, letter, 12 March 1837.

[34] Jones, *Foreign Office*, pp. 26 and 95–9. On the life and misfortunes of one of the most virulent critics of the agency system, see: G. R. Berridge, *A Diplomatic Whistleblower in the Victorian Era: The Life and Writings of E. C. Grenville-Murray* (Istanbul, 2017), particularly pp. 47–8.

Trade Department, Charles Parnther and Henry Scott, had misappropriated more than £1,500 from accounts for which they were responsible. Parnther, though dishonest, certainly had the credentials of a gentleman. His father, a barrister, was a friend of Palmerston; he had been educated at Eton and Cambridge; he had played cricket for the MCC; and he had been Bandinel's principal assistant. However, he had lately been in poor health, and it had taken him ten years to achieve regrading and a very modest improvement in his income. Ironically, in the aftermath of the scandal and the absconding of Parnther and Scott, the Slave Trade Department was, with the Treasury's concurrence, assimilated into the Office's regular establishment.[35]

The reconstitution of the Slave Trade Department was but one of several reforms introduced during Lord Clarendon's first term as foreign secretary (1853–8). These followed from a Treasury enquiry into the workings of the Foreign Office, but were instigated partly in response to an increase in departmental business, particularly during the Crimean War. They resulted in an expansion in the number of clerks and the Treasury's reluctant acceptance of a separate class of assistant clerks immediately below that of the senior clerks. By 1858 there were in all some forty-three clerks of the regular establishment, almost the same number as that at the beginning of the twentieth century. But the Foreign Office resisted Treasury efforts to achieve economies through the employment of copyists, or what would later be described as lower- or, from 1890, second-division clerks, to undertake non-intellectual duties. The work of the Foreign Office was, so the argument ran, of such a confidential and so important a nature that it could only be done by clerks who were absolutely trustworthy and therefore gentlemen known to the foreign secretary and properly rewarded according to their class.[36] This was not entirely specious. Had Parnther and Scott been better paid, they might not have yielded to temptation. Moreover, the dangers inherent in recruiting copyists seemed adequately demonstrated when on the eve of the Berlin Congress of 1878, Charles Marvin, a journalist employed as a 'temporary writer' in the Treaty Department, revealed to the press the substance of an accord secretly negotiated between the foreign secretary Lord Salisbury and the Russian ambassador in London. Tenterden, for one, hoped that in future they would 'not have to depend on this cheap and untrustworthy class of people'.[37] The Office, nevertheless, continued to employ the supplemental clerks of the non-political departments on salary scales inferior to those of the regular establishment. Those in the Librarian's Department had ready access to confidential papers, and in the early 1870s the Office tried unsuccessfully to win Treasury consent to their upgrading. Indeed, following the Office's acquiescence in their appointment to the Chief Clerk's Department and the Commercial and Consular Department, in 1888 four lower-division clerks were recruited to the Librarian's Department to help cope with its staff shortage. Two years later the Royal Commission on the Civil Establishments (the Ridley Commission) recommended, and the Foreign Office

[35] Hamilton, 'Zealots and Helots', pp. 26–30.
[36] Jones, *Foreign Office*, pp. 37–40.
[37] Ibid., pp. 24–5 and 104–5. A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London, 1999), pp. 193–4. TNA, FO 363/5, Tenterden to Salisbury, letter, 15 June 1878.

eventually accepted, the progressive replacement of the supplemental clerks by those of the second division.

The recommendations of the Ridley Commission were very much in line with the Treasury's endeavour to achieve economies and greater uniformity in the grading and remuneration of civil servants across Whitehall. This affected not only clerks of the Foreign Office but also its foreign and home service messengers. The Office responded with similar arguments about its special needs and responsibilities and the confidentiality of its work. As foreign secretary in the 1830s, Palmerston embarked on what was later regarded as an ill-judged gentrification of the queen's foreign service messengers. But technological advances, the advent of railways, steamships and the electric telegraph, reduced the Office's dependence on the messengers' equestrian skills. The gentlemen may have preferred their horse-drawn chaises, but both the Office and the Treasury looked to make savings from shorter journey times and the consolidation and reduction of messenger allowances. Meanwhile, efforts were made to reduce expenditure on home service messengers, who, though they were employed almost wholly in delivering correspondence within the British Isles, enjoyed the same privileged status as their foreign service colleagues. This again meant challenging Foreign Office exceptionalism, though it might be better understood as the continuation of a process of rationalizing and reorganizing the department's subordinate staff.

The gradual substitution of second-division clerks for those previously classed as supplemental did little to ease a problem which had long beset the Librarian's Department. Faced with an ever-expanding inflow of correspondence, the department had in its role as the Office's records division struggled to cope with mounting arrears in its indexing and final registration of documents. The establishment in 1906 of a general registry, staffed by second-division clerks and separate from the library, was intended by over-optimistic reformers to resolve this issue. It was also a key element in a radical restructuring package which allowed for a greater devolution of business and by which, as Sir John Tilley later recalled, 'the "Office", as distinct from the Secretary of State, became a body with a highly influential opinion'.[38] The bright young men recruited as junior clerks, an increasing number of whom had university degrees, were thereby spared some of those tedious chores which had so preoccupied their predecessors. Instead, they were offered the opportunity to develop their own specialist talents and to take a more active interest in policy-related matters. Those in the Office who served beneath the clerical grades were not so obviously affected by these changes. They, be they officekeepers, doorkeepers, maidservants or porters, belonged to domestic hierarchies whose duties were less clearly defined. For some of them the Foreign Office was both a home and a workplace, and whole families of servants were raised on Downing Street. Their stories are possibly of only marginal interest to diplomatic and political historians. They, nevertheless, offer fresh insights into the administrative and social history of Whitehall. Almost a century ago, in an essay on the Foreign Office, Algernon Cecil described the early and mid-Victorian age of diplomacy as 'just easy enough to be agreeable, just ceremonious

[38] Tilley and Gaselee, *Foreign Office*, p. 161.

enough to possess distinction, and just industrious enough to do its work'.[39] What follows offers a view of life in the Office as seen from a rather different perspective, one in which the more decorative aspects of diplomacy were tempered by dilapidated buildings, malodorous kitchens, malfunctioning lifts and sewers, smoking chimneys and disease-ridden basement apartments. It was one too in which, even amongst gentlemen and their servants, industry, obedience and sobriety were interspersed with bouts of indolence, insolence and intoxication.

[39] A. Cecil, 'The Foreign Office', *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919* (3 vols, New York, 1923), eds. A. Ward and G. P. Gooch, vol. 3, p. 599.

1

Keepers of the Office

Accommodation and domestic staff, 1782–1868

> *[T]he buildings now occupied by the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office . . . are inadequate to the present extent of public business, in parts unsafe, and generally in such a state of dilapidation as to render it inexpedient to expend any large sum in their substantial repair.*

Report from the Select Committee on the Public Offices (Downing Street), 29 July 1839[1]

> *[T]he office-keepers are absolutely worn out . . . from the straggling state of the office they cannot perform their labour, from the immense length from one end of the office to the other.*
>
> Thomas Bidwell Jr., chief clerk, 11 July 1839[2]

The early Victorian Foreign Office occupied a less than stately edifice. Following its relocation in December 1793 to Lord Sheffield's former home on the south side of Downing Street, other neighbouring properties were leased and later purchased from Sir Samuel Fludyer, a wealthy merchant. Then in 1825 the government bought, initially with the object of providing an official residence for the foreign secretary, an adjoining mansion from a shipowner and marine insurance broker, Sir Robert 'Floating Bob' Preston.[3] It, along with houses accommodating the Colonial Office, formed part of a small square closing off the western end of Downing Street.[4] Soon after this addition, the architect Sir John Soane was engaged to oversee necessary structural changes and the construction of a new ground-floor façade, including the replacement of external gas lamps originally fitted in 1817. The building contained some fine rooms: one overlooking St James's Park in which formal dinners and receptions were hosted and a first-floor salon which until 1856 was used regularly for Cabinet meetings. But there was no disguising the fact that the Office was made up of what had once

1 House of Commons (HC), *Report from the Select Committee on Public Offices (Downing Street) with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Plans* (London, 1839), p. iii.
2 Ibid., minutes, para. 161.
3 FO 366/672, Planta to Arbuthnot, letters, 22 August and 9 November 1820; Planta to Lushington, letter, 9 June 1825; Herries to Planta, letter, 6 July 1825; Planta to Herries, letter, 5 October 1825.
4 Young, *Colonial Office*, p. 125.