

What files? Thousands of govt papers on Falklands & Troubles vanish from National Archives

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A massive trove of government papers detailing some dark episodes of British history, including the Falklands War and the notorious Northern Irish Troubles, have vanished from the National Archives.

Almost 1,000 files, each thought to contain dozens of British government papers, have disappeared from the National Archives in London after civil servants removed them from the institution, a [Guardian](#) investigation has revealed.

By odd coincidence, the disappearance affects some of the most controversial parts of 20th-century British history, namely papers concerning the Falklands War, Northern Ireland's Troubles and British colonial rule in Palestine.

Other files that vanished detailed tests on polio vaccines and long-running territorial disputes between the UK and Argentina, as well as the infamous Zinoviev letter from the 1920s, which the British secret services claimed to be a directive from Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Moscow-based Communist International (Komintern), to the Communist Party of Great Britain, ordering it to provoke civil war and unrest.



An entire file on the Zinoviev letter scandal vanished after Home Office staff took it away, according to the [Guardian](#). The Home Office declined to explain to the paper who removed the files from the National Archives and why. It also did not say whether any copies had been made.

Other files the National Archives has reported as *"misplaced while on loan to government department"* include one concerning the way in which the British government took possession of Russian Empire funds held in British banks after the 1917 revolution. Specific papers from within certain files have also been carefully selected and removed.

"The National Archives regularly sends lists to government departments of files that they have out on loan," a spokesman for the institution said. *"If we are notified that a file is missing, we do ask what actions have been done and what action is being taken to find the*

file.”

The revelations may leave historians particularly suspicious, as it is not the first time files documenting controversial episodes of Britain’s past have disappeared or been destroyed. In August last year, records linking the UK to Israel’s nuclear program went missing from the National Archives. The archives assured the public it was following a “*robust*” plan to find the lost files.

A few years earlier, the Foreign Office revealed that multiple documents that “*might embarrass members of the police, military forces, public servants (such as police agents or informers)*” in former British colonies or “*might compromise sources of intelligence*” were deliberately destroyed as part of ‘*Operation Legacy*’.

‘*Operation Legacy*’ also called for the destruction or removal of “*all papers which are likely to be interpreted, either reasonably or by malice, as indicating racial prejudice or bias.*”

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National Archives

Government admits 'losing' thousands of papers from National Archives

Documents on the Falklands, Northern Ireland’s Troubles, and the infamous Zinoviev letter among those ‘misplaced’, leaving historians suspicious



The hoard came to light during high court proceedings brought by a group of elderly Kenyans who were detained and abused during the Mau Mau insurgency in 1950s Kenya. Photograph: Popperfoto/Getty Images

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Thousands of government papers detailing some of the most controversial episodes in 20th-century British history have vanished after civil servants removed them from the country's [National Archives](#) and then reported them as lost.

Documents concerning the Falklands war, Northern Ireland's Troubles and the infamous Zinoviev letter – in which MI6 officers plotted to bring about the downfall of the first Labour government - are all said to have been misplaced.

Other missing files concern the British colonial administration in Palestine, tests on polio vaccines and long-running territorial disputes between the UK and Argentina.

Almost 1,000 files, each thought to contain dozens of papers, are affected. In most instances the entire file is said to have been mislaid after being removed from public view at the archives and taken back to Whitehall.

An entire file on the Zinoviev letter scandal is said to have been lost after Home Office civil servants took it away. The Home Office declined to say why it was taken or when or how it was lost. Nor would it say whether any copies had been made.

In other instances, papers from within files have been carefully selected and taken away.

Foreign Office officials removed a small number of papers in 2015 from a file concerning the 1978 murder of Georgi Markov, a dissident Bulgarian journalist who died after being shot in the leg with a tiny pellet containing ricin while crossing Waterloo Bridge in central London.

The Foreign Office subsequently told the National Archives that the papers taken were nowhere to be found.

After being questioned by the Guardian, it said it had managed to locate most of the papers and return them to the archives. A couple, however, are still missing. The FO declined to say why it had taken the papers, or whether it had copies.

Other files the National Archives has listed as “misplaced while on loan to government department” include one concerning the activities of the Communist party of Great Britain at the height of the cold war; another detailing the way in which the British government took possession of Russian government funds held in British banks after the 1917 revolution; an assessment for government ministers on the security situation in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s; and three files about defence agreements between the UK and newly independent Malaya in the late 1950s, shortly before the two countries went to war with Indonesia.

The disappearances highlight the ease with which government departments can commandeer official papers long after they have been declassified and made available to historians and the public at the archives at Kew, south-west London.

A Freedom of Information Act request in 2014 showed that 9,308 files were returned to government departments in this way in 2011. The following year 7,122 files were loaned out, and 7,468 in 2013. The National Archives says Whitehall departments are strongly encouraged to promptly return them, but they are not under any obligation to do so.

“The National Archives regularly sends lists to government departments of files that they have out on loan,” a spokesperson said. “If we are notified that a file is missing, we do ask what actions have been done and what action is being taken to find the file.”

Some historians have been particularly distrustful of the Foreign Office since 2013, when [the Guardian disclosed](#) that the department had been unlawfully hoarding 1.2m

historical files at a high-security compound near Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire.

The hoard came to light during high court proceedings brought by a group of elderly Kenyans who were detained and abused during the Mau Mau insurgency in 1950s Kenya, when the Foreign Office admitted it had withheld thousands of colonial-era files.

A few years earlier, the Ministry of Defence refused to consider a number of files for release under the Freedom of Information Act on the grounds that they [may have been exposed](#) to asbestos.

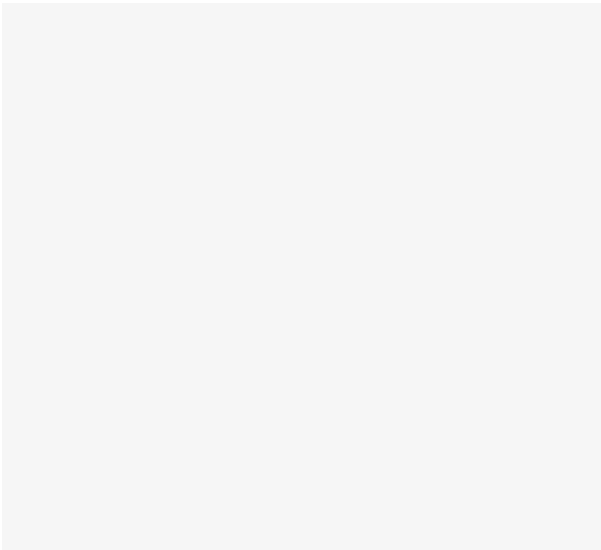
The files concerned such matters as arms sales to Saudi Arabia, UK special forces operations against Indonesia and interrogation techniques. The MoD denied it was using the presence of asbestos in an old archive building as an excuse to suppress the documents.

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