Opening up the Foreign Office: projects to improve access to Foreign Office correspondence

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Programme to improve access to Foreign Office records

1. Rationalising and re-writing research guides
2. Completing FO Codes project
3. Enhancing descriptions to pre-1906 correspondence
4. Improving guidance on using indexes and registers
5. Cataloguing FO series in detail for 1906
6. Adding supporting content to Your Archives
1. Rationalising and re-writing research guides

- Currently 35 research guides covering overseas records: a hotchpotch built up over time. E.g.:
  - Detailed guides on Indonesia after 1945 and on China, but none on most other countries.
  - Detailed advice on using indexes for 1906 to 1920, but none for 1920 to 1959 or 1782 to 1905.

- Rationalise down to 20-24 guides
  - More rational, more useful information
  - All guides cross-linked, and prepared for easy conversion to web-pages
  - Special regional guides to replace paper ‘FO Index’
2. Post-1906 correspondence codes project

- Aims to place information in the catalogue from the card indexes to make converting references easier
- To complete by the end of this year
- Accompanied by new ‘How to’ leaflets and research guides
3. **Pre-1906 correspondence project**

- Aims to improve information in the catalogue to help locate records registered in the FO 605 Index/Register series.
- Currently, readers take information from indexes/registers then match up with relevant series to pick out correct volume.
3. Pre-1906 correspondence project contd.

- Matching up process can be tricky and not necessarily intuitive: (e.g. FO 27/265 onwards (1822), 284 onwards (1823))
4. Improving guidance to indexes and registers

- New ‘How To’ leaflets for every major index.

5. 1906 Foreign Office project

- Led by Amanda Bevan – cataloguing that year in detail
6. Content added to Your Archives

- Superseded research guides
- Detailed information on particular countries and colonies as knowledge is developed
- Listings of foreign ambassadors and ministers in London
- Listings of British consuls abroad