

Civil Servants Are Deliberately Destroying Documents from the UK's National Archive

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Region: [Europe](#)

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In yet another galling example of historical revisionism put into practice, the [Guardian](#) reported Tuesday that thousands of documents from the National Archives have gone missing in recent years – and some may have been deliberately destroyed by civil servants hoping to purge unflattering details about the UK's abuses of power from the historical record.

Per the [Guardian](#):

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.

The controversy echos [another incident](#) from 2013 when a Guardian investigation found that the Foreign Office was storing documents that shed light on the brutality of colonialism from the in a secret bunker, where they would be safe from the public's prying eyes. According to public records, many of the files that have gone missing this time around were "loaned out" to employees of the Foreign Office, which was responsible for the 2013 incident. Many others were taken by representatives of the Home Office.



The photo above shows a group of elderly Kenyans who were detained and abused during the Mau Mau insurgency

For example, an entire file on the Zinoviev letter scandal is said to have been lost after Home Office civil servants took it away. When approached by the Guardian, the Home Office

declined to say why it was taken or when or how it was lost. Nor would its say whether any copies had been made. In some instances, files have been returned with pages missing.

In one example, 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. When asked about their whereabouts, the FO said it had no knowledge of where they might be.

While the National Archives told the Guardian that they follow up when files go missing, going by the department's comments below, their enforcement efforts sound disturbingly weak. Beyond calling and asking what's being done to locate the missing files.

Some of the other files the National Archives has listed as "misplaced while on loan to government department" include information concerning activities of the Communist party of Great Britain at the height of the Cold War. Another details the way in which the British government took possession of Russian government funds held in British banks after the 1917 revolution. Still another includes an assessment prepared for government ministers on the security situation in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s.

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."

The [Guardian](#) first caught wind of the missing files during high court proceedings brought by a group of elderly Kenyans who were detained and abused during the Mau Mau insurgency in 1950s Kenya.

The FO and HO aren't the only departments seemingly restricting access to information that would cast a negative light on British history.

One time, the Ministry of Defense refused to release files about arms sales to Saudi Arabia and special forces operations against Indonesia. The official excuse? The files had been exposed to asbestos, the MOD said.

A likely story indeed.

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