STATE PAPERS ONLINE COLONIAL:
ASIA, PART II: SINGAPORE, EAST MALAYSIA, AND BRUNEI

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

QUICK FACTS

Source: The National Archives, United Kingdom

Size: Approximately 500,000 pages (over 3,300 files & volumes)

Content Types: Handwritten, typed, and printed documents, including confidential correspondence, as well as maps and photographs

Date Range: 1759–1967

Available: September 2023

Newly Digitized Materials: 100%

Disciplines Supported: Southeast Asian history, British Empire history, colonialism, postcolonialism, British imperialism, nationalism, history of Communism, history of trade and commerce, race and religions in Southeast Asia, history of Indigenous peoples, nation and states, World War II Asian theater
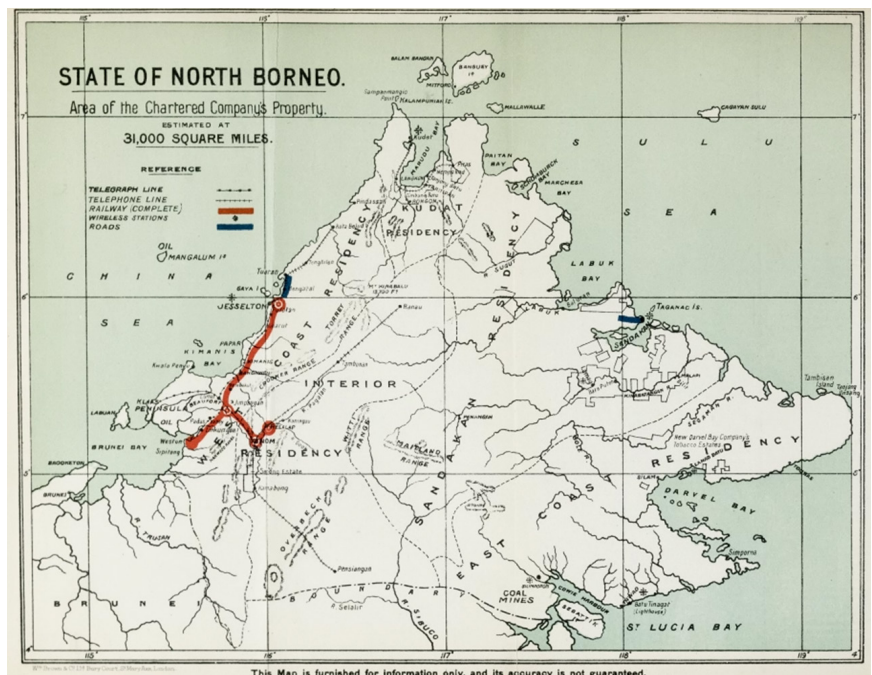
Complementary Gale Archives:

- *State Papers Online Colonial: Asia, Part I: Far East, Hong Kong, and Wei-Hai-Wei*
- *China and the Modern World*
- *Declassified Documents Online*
- *The Making of the Modern World*
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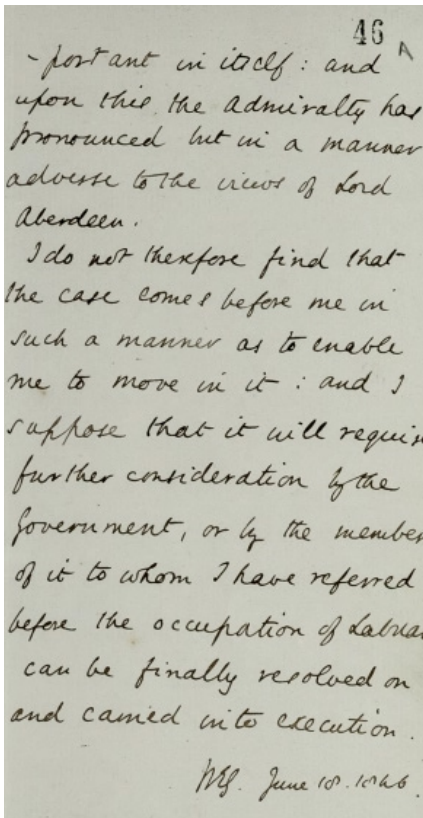- As a complement to searching, browse content in the file order in which it was arranged by the source library

Map of North Borneo (Sabah) by the British North Borneo Company, made to illustrate infrastructure plans. The map is included in the Colonial Office List, which is an annual listing of Colonial Office and local ministers and officials who are notable as those who reviewed the documents in this series. Crown Copyright images reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, UK.

DELIVER GREATER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

These British Colonial Office files document two hundred years of British engagement with the people and resources of Singapore, Brunei, Labuan, Sarawak, and British North Borneo (now Sabah). Researchers will find insight into Britain's administration and governance of these countries, their international relations across the period, and the changing demographics and daily life of inhabitants. The documents also showcase how colonial history continues to influence these now-independent countries through chosen strategic alliances, manners of conduct, and institutional structures and how they deal with the repercussions of their colonial legacies today.

Original handwritten correspondence from June 1848 regarding governance of Labuan. ". . . I suppose that it will require further consideration by the Government, or by the member of it to whom I have referred, before the occupation of Labuan can be finally resolved on . . ." CO 144/1; Crown Copyright images reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, UK.

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

State Papers Online Colonial: Asia, Part II: Singapore, East Malaysia, and Brunei forms the second installment of *State Papers Online Colonial*, a digitization of the British Colonial Office's files (CO series) of documents now housed in The National Archives in the United Kingdom. The collections within *State Papers Online Colonial: Asia* contain files within the CO series that concern countries and territories within Asia, and *Part II* is focused primarily on Singapore and East Malaysia.

The collection includes ordinances, financial reports, and documents that reveal the daily lives of the indigenous, immigrant, and expatriate communities. Researchers will find files on the rubber trade, agriculture, and forestry; the issues of opium, slavery, and communism; the grant of civic rights to non-British subjects; the Singapore Development Bill; land valuations; the Singapore riots of 1950; key British corporate and colonial interests such as the Eastern Archipelago and British North Borneo companies; changes in territorial governance; the rule of the Sultans of Brunei and Sulu and the White Rajahs of Sarawak, as well as Indigenous chiefs; discussions of new constitutions and developments plans, including the minutes and papers of the Consultative Committee of Colombo Plan; and the Japanese occupation during World War II. Alongside the country-specific series, this collection also includes 178 confidential correspondence files of approximately 18,000 pages about these territories.

VALUE OF THE ARCHIVE

- **Supports Researchers:** The collection includes mainly English-language documents covering a major sector of formerly colonized Southeast Asia.
- **Comprehensive in Scope:** The breadth of the material allows researchers to trace the "route to independence" for each of the key countries included.
- **Unique Content:** Offering newly digitized materials with minimal overlap with existing products, these documents are often the only record of people and events in the countries concerned.
- **Scholarly Appeal:** The archive supports studies in the religion, politics, agriculture, and trade of Southeast Asia from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries.
- **Greater Perspective and Representation:** Documents chronicle the changing demographics and the daily life of inhabitants, the international relations of the region across the period, and reasoning behind decisions.
- **Refine Search:** The collection includes a country/territory and a region search limiter.
- **Handwritten Text Recognition:** *State Papers Online Colonial*, which features many handwritten documents and annotations, benefits from handwritten text recognition (HTR) technology as well as OCR, such that printed, typed, and handwritten texts are all fully searchable.
- **In Great Company:** The files in this archive complement or offer more specific detail to many themes found in *State Papers Online Colonial: Asia, Part I.*

Article from *The Straits Times* on May 31, 1951, announcing the coronation of the Sultan of Brunei, Pengiran Omar Ali Saifuddin. Coronation speeches are all included in the file. CO 943/1/13; Crown Copyright images reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, UK.

TOPICS COVERED

- Chinese communities in East Malaysia
- The Cobbold Commission and Federation of Malaysia
- Coexistence of sultans, rajahs, trading companies, and British governors or residents
- Communism in Asia, and the perceived threat by the British government
- Details of political parties and their activities
- Establishment of trading companies to exploit local resources, notably the British North Borneo Company, known as the "British East India Company" of Southeast Asia
- The fallout from the failure of Britain to defend Singapore and now Malaysia from the Japanese in World War II, which destroyed its credibility as an infallible ruler in the eyes of the local people
- Indigenous peoples
- Sultans in Brunei retaining the throne during the British protectorate
- Trade, exports, and the development of the rubber, timber, oil, coal, electricity, railway, fishing, and banking industries
- Transfer of power from local sultans to colonial rule and colonial rule to independence
- The "White Rajahs"

CONTENT SAMPLES

- **CO 874/1104 War with Japan, 1941–1943.** This file contains communications, including intercepted Japanese broadcasts, between the CO and the British Governor of North Borneo (now Sabah, Malaysia), during Japanese occupation in World War II.

- **CO 953/12/6 Assassination of D.G. Stewart, Governor of Sarawak: trial and enquiry, 1950.** In December 1949, Duncan George Stewart, the British Governor of Sarawak, was assassinated. While the British government officially concluded that an anti-cession movement supporting the continued rule of "White Rajah" Anthony Brooke carried out the assassination, confidential files reveal that there was likely involvement from outside parties.

CONTENT SAMPLES, CONTINUED

- **CO 953/46–53 Commission of Inquiry into Riots of 1950: Official record. Transcript of evidence, days 1–19, 1951.** Violent riots broke out after an appeals court in Singapore decided 13-year-old Maria Hertogh should be taken from her Malay Muslim foster mother and passed to her Dutch Catholic birth parents, outraging the Muslim community. Troops and police only managed to regain control of the situation on the third day, after 18 were killed and 173 injured. After a two-week curfew, a Commission of Inquiry was appointed by British Governor Franklin Gimson and concluded that the police were largely to blame. The British House of Commons criticized the colonial government for its poor handling of the situation, and the report was condemned by some for focusing on colonial administration lessons rather than definitively establishing the causes of the riot. The incident is cited as a lesson in the importance of racial and religious understanding and the potential harm that can come from sensationalized and distorted information in media.

- **CO 953/20 Chinese population in Southeast Asia: Questionnaire and answers, 1955.** Questionnaires were sent to the British consuls in each country, requesting such information as population, education, influence of Peking government, trade unions, and political and cultural activities. Replies were supplied on Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Sumatra, North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak, Singapore, Malaya, East Java, and Burma. Per a sample response from Singapore: "As Singapore is predominently [sic] a Chinese city the electorel [sic] population is divided in varying proportions among the five political parties. It is not possible to give figures . . ."

- **CO 947 Commission of Enquiry in North Borneo and Sarawak Regarding Malaysian Federation (Cobbold Commission, 1962).** Following a directive issued by UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, a commission of inquiry was established to determine whether the people of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak supported the proposal to create the Federation of Malaysia, consisting of Malaya, Brunei, Singapore, North Borneo, and Sarawak. This report was submitted in August 1963.

SERIES INCLUDED

Dept	Series	Title	Date Range	Number of Volumes	Number of Pages
CO	144	Labuan, Original Correspondence	1844–1906	81	41,149
CO	352	Labuan Register of Correspondence	1849–1914	7	1,652
CO	404	Labuan Entry Books	1847–1872	5	1,206
CO	487	Labuan Register of Out-Letters	1871–1914	4	359
CO	531	British North Borneo Original Correspondence	1907–1951	52 [416 parts]	35,200
CO	777	British North Borneo: Register of Correspondence	1915–1941	4	688
CO	778	British North Borneo: Register of Out-Letters	1915–1926	1	92
CO	874	British North Borneo Company: Papers	1865–1949	1128	257,507
CO	954	Borneo Territories: Original Correspondence	1946–1951	8 [43 parts]	4,585
CO	938	Sarawak: Original Correspondence	1946–1951	12 [122 parts]	7,445
CO	1040	The Rajah of Sarawak Fund: Papers	1921–1966	9	1,341
CO	943	Brunei: Original Correspondence	1946–1951	2 [35 parts]	1,346
CO	953	Singapore Original Correspondence	1936–1951	18 [139 parts]	13,658
CO	1010	Singapore: Registers of Correspondence	1946–1951	5	1,863
CO	991	Malayan Union and Singapore: Registers of Correspondence	1946–1951	8	3,917
CO	992	North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak: Registers of Correspondence	1942–1951	5	2,203
CO	947	Commission of Enquiry in North Borneo and Sarawak Regarding Malaysian Federation (Cobbold Commission, 1962)	1962	61	8,185
CO	537	Colonial Office and predecessors: Confidential Original Correspondence	1759–1955	178	18,005
CO	1022	South East Asia Department: Original Correspondence	1950–1956	193	14,455
CO	1030	Far Eastern Department and successors: Original Correspondence	1941–1967	809	88,479
CO	700	Maps and Plans: Series I	1849–1909	27	80
CO	1047	Maps and Plans: Series II	1779–1947	11	38
CO	1054	Maps and Plans: Post-1940 Collection	1897–1984	8	16
CO	1069	Photographs	1863–1960s	52	2,226
				Total	**506,093**

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