

FROM:

THE RT. HON. LORD HAILSHAM OF ST. MARYLEBONE, C.H., F.R.S., D.C.L.



Green in
CSD + A
Comments coming over
by 20.2.
HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

14th February 1980

The Right Honourable
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London S.W.1.

My dear Margaret

PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE

You have no doubt seen the angry letters in the Times criticising the proposal to close the Public Record Office's search room in Chancery Lane, which follows the decision we took to reduce by 10% staff costs in departments generally.

These letters are the tip of an iceberg. I have had a strong protest from my Advisory Council on Public Records and similar protests from about 70 historians and researchers, many of them representing faculties or groups. I have also had letters from about 30 Members of Parliament, ^(25 Conservative) some of them critical and hardly any sympathetic. The ~~(25 Conservative)~~ attached list shows the kind of opposition we may face.

Virtually all the complainants contend that the inconvenience caused to readers who would be obliged to travel to Kew and requisition documents from Chancery Lane will tend to stultify effective research and that the transport of valuable ^{and often irreplaceable} documents to and from Kew is fraught with risks. Although the Keeper of Public Records would do his best to minimise these difficulties, the proposal would diminish the ready access to records which the public rightly expect us to provide and on which the Wilson Committee on Public Records will lay great stress when they report towards the end of this year. Moreover, the proposal will do much to sabotage the goodwill (both domestic and international) which has been so carefully restored since the controversial move to Kew in 1977.

continued.../ -

I always had misgivings about the proposal. I acquiesced in it, but I warned Christopher Soames at the time that we were risking a row. It is now perfectly clear that if we persist we shall have a row, and I am doubtful whether we can carry the day if the proposal is debated in Parliament. In my view it would be better to reverse our decision voluntarily rather than be compelled to do so by a Parliamentary defeat.

I am advised by the Keeper of Public Records that the proposal cannot be dispensed with if the Office is to achieve the 10% target. Although the Advisory Council is looking at the alternatives, I have no reason to think that they can find a solution which would not prejudice the proper management of Government records and the proper execution of the Public Records Acts.

There is a further consideration. Now that we have a fine modern building at Kew with scope for expansion, there is an obvious case for considering our strategy for the future use of Kew and Chancery Lane. The present proposal would seriously complicate such an appraisal, for the Keeper will have to resort to makeshift expedients which will render more costly and more difficult the orderly rearrangement of the records and redeployment of staff. To that extent the proposal is bad administration and bad economics.

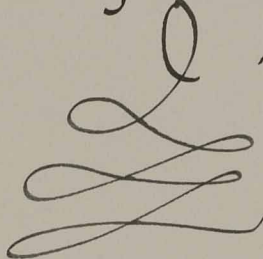
All these considerations make me think that we ought to be prepared to accept a rather smaller cut in the PRO now (sufficient to enable Chancery Lane to continue for the time being); and that priority should be given to the working out of a long-term strategy for Kew and Chancery Lane which would lead to greater economies later on.

There is little to be gained by waiting for the Advisory Council's views, even if they are made known before the matter is raised in Parliament. On the basis of a 10% cut they will either find an acceptable alternative or not. If it were acceptable, which I think is most unlikely, we should all welcome it. If not, we shall be left at least as vulnerable as we are now, and perhaps exposed to a fresh round of criticism on the ground that we are ignoring constructive recommendations.

I would not normally trouble you with a matter of this sort; but vivid recollections of what happened last time round when we proposed to charge entrance fees for museums, etc., leaves me in no doubt that the furor academicus we have now aroused is quite capable of doing us an amount of Parliamentary injury which is simply not worthwhile incurring. I am sure that if there is no concession we could not hold the House of Lords on a Division.

In view of his responsibilities for our general policy on manpower, I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Channon.

Yrs,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'L' followed by several horizontal, wavy lines that trail off to the right.

Members of Parliament

Michael English M.P. (Lab: Nottingham West)
Ian Sproat M.P. (Con: Aberdeen South) (2 constituents)
David Price M.P. (Con: Eastleigh)
Peter Fraser M.P. (Con: Angus South)
John Roper M.P. (LA/Co: Farnworth)
Robin Maxwell - Hyslop M.P. (Con: Tiverton)
John Hunt M.P. (Con: Bromley Ravensbourne)
Geoffrey Finsberg M.P. (Con: Camden, Hampstead)
George Cunningham M.P. (Lab: Islington South)
Ian Grist M.P. (Con: Cardiff North)
Michael Grylls M.P. (Con: Surrey North West)
Hugh Rossi M.P. (Con: Haringey, Hornsey)
Sir Donald Kaberry M.P. (Con: Leeds North West)
John Patten M.P. (Con: Oxford)
Ernie Ross M.P. (Lab: Dundee West)
Michael Latham M.P. (Con: Melton)
Tom Dalyell M.P. (Lab: West Lothian)
Alastair Goodlad M.P. (Con: Norwich)
Michael Mates M.P. (Con: Petersfield)
Charles Irving M.P. (Con: Cheltenham)
Rt.Hon.Patrick Jenkin M.P. (Con: Redbridge, Wanstead and Woodford)
Wyn Roberts M.P. (Con: Conway) (2 constituents)
Robert Adley M.P. (Con: Christchurch and Lymington)
Ivor Stanbrook M.P. (Con: Orpington)
Jocelyn Cadbury M.P. (Con: Northfield)
Philip Goodhart M.P. (Con: Bromley, Beckenham)
The Prime Minister (2 constituents)

Peers

Lord Dacre of Glanton

Accedemics

Dr. M.G.A. Vale (St.John's College,Oxford)
Miss J.Birrell (The Open University)
Professor P.J.V.Rolo (University of Keele)
Professor J.F.C.Harrison (University of Sussex)
Professor D.E.Luxcombe (University of Sheffield)
Professor A.W.B.Simpson (University of Kent)
G.C.F.Forster (University of Leeds)
H.M.Colvin (St.John's College,Oxford)
I.A.Shapiro (University of Birmingham)
M.Cherry (University of Leicester)
Professor J.P.Kenyon (University of Hull)
Professor C.N.L.Brooke (Faculty of History,Cambridge)
The Vice-Chancellor (University of Kent)
Miss J.H.Stevenson (Editor,Victoria County History of Wiltshire)
D.Birmingham (Faculty of Humanities; Kent University)
Professor J.A.Watt (Department of History - University of Newcastle)
Professor M.J.Wilks (Department of History - Birbeck College,London)
R.L.Storey (University of Nottingham)
Mrs.N.Knight (Assistant Editor, Victoria History of Essex)
N.M.Fudge (Institute of Historical Research - University of London)
J.Taylor (University of Leeds)
W.R.Powell (Editor, Victoria History of Essex)
Mrs.C.M.Short (Society of Archivists)
D.E.D.Beales (Chairman Faculty Board of History - Cambridge University)
Professor N.Hampson (University of York)
Professor H.G.Koenigsberger (King's College - London University)
Dr.M.H.Merriman (University of Lancaater)
R.M.Hogg (University of Wales)
Professor C.Ross (University of Bristol)
M.L.Zell (Thames Polytechnic)
A.Marwick (Open University)
Professor A.R.Myers (University of Liverpool)
Professor A.R.Hall (Imperial College of Science and Technology)
Professor R.F.Leslie (Queen Mary College - London University)
Professor G.S.Holmes (University of Lancaster)
Dorothy M.Owen (Keeper of the Cambridge University Archives)
Professor I.Roos (University of Exeter)
A.B.Webster (Chairman Board of Studies in History - Kent University)

C.R.Elrlington (Victoria History of the Counties of England)

C.J.Davey (University of Dundee)

G.C.Gibbs (Royal Historical Society)

R.H.C.Davis (School of History - University of Birmingham)

O.Charlton (Local Population Studies)

M.W.Greenslade (Editor,Victoria History of Stafford)

Dr.A.MacFarlane (Department of Social Anthropology - Cambridge University
Department of History - University of Southampton)

Sir Robert Somerville (British Records Association)

M.Sherwood (Polytechnic of North London)

A.M.Newman (University of Leicester)

14 FEB 1960

6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8
6 7 8

COURTESY