

PREM19

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HOME AFFAIRS

(Sale of Isle of Iona)

Confidential Filing

The sale of the Island of Iona

HOME AFFAIRS

May 1979

| Referred to | Date | Referred to | Date | Referred to | Date | Referred to | Date |
|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| 24.5.79     |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |
| 29.5.79     |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |
| 7-6-79      |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |
| PREM 19/66  |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |



Home Affairs 2

Lambeth Palace, SE1 7JU.

7th June, 1979.

My dear Prime Minister,

I am grateful to you for your letter of the 29th May about Iona, which arrived while I was in Eastern Europe.

The intervention of the Hugh Fraser Foundation is a happy event. It seems that this will ensure the safeguarding of the Island as we now know it.

I am informing the Anglican Consultative Council, on whose behalf I wrote to you, of this outcome.

Yours very sincerely,

Donald Cantuar.

mb.

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,  
10 Downing Street,  
LONDON, S.W.1.



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

29 May 1979

TT  
cc SO  
As Robinson  
- Home Affairs

My dear Archbishop.

When you came to see me on 24 May, you left with me a letter about the future of the Island of Iona, enclosing the text of a motion adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council.

George Younger has been keeping an eye on developments. He tells me that the property on offer is essentially crofting and farming land on the Island: the Abbey and other historic monuments are in the hands of the Trustees.

I understand that the property was put on the open market this week, after unsuccessful attempts by the National Trust for Scotland to conclude a private treaty sale with the Argyll Trustees. As a result, the Hugh Fraser Foundation announced on 23 May that it was prepared to put up £1½ million. I understand that the offer has been made and accepted in principle. What remains to be clarified is whether the Island is to be passed to the Secretary of State or to the National Trust.

I hope that this latest turn of events meets your concern about the future of Iona. I am grateful to you for drawing my attention to the question, and I agree that it is important to prevent any radical alteration of the present character and use of the Island.

It was a great pleasure to see you.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Thatcher

His Grace The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury

— lw



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

You asked for advice on the Archbishop of Canterbury's letter about the Island of Iona (Flag A). The Secretary of State for Scotland has been keeping a close watch on developments, and his office summarises the position as at Flag B.

I attach a draft letter for you to send to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

*("My dear Archbishop")*

25 May 1979



*Home Affairs.*

SCOTTISH OFFICE  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2AU

Mike Pattison Esq  
Private Secretary  
No 10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

24 May 1979

*Dear Mike*

Further to your letter of 24 May I attach a note on the proposed sale of the Island of Iona.

*Your sincerely  
John Wilson*

J S WILSON  
Private Secretary

BACKGROUND NOTE

IONA

1. The property on offer is essentially the crofting and farming land on the island: the Abbey and the other historic monuments are in the hands of trustees.
2. After unsuccessful attempts by the National Trust for Scotland to conclude a private treaty sale with the Argyll Trustees at £600,000 the property was put on the open market this week.
3. The Hugh Fraser Foundation announced yesterday that it was prepared to put up £1½ million to buy the island for the nation. The latest news is that the offer has been made and accepted in principle. What is not clear yet is whether the island is to be passed to the Secretary of State or the National Trust.

SCOTTISH OFFICE  
24 May 1979





25 MAY 1978

B/F 29.5.79

Home Affairs

24 May 1979

We spoke this morning about the Archbishop of Canterbury's request that the Prime Minister investigate the Government's powers to intervene over the possible sale of the island of Iona.

I now enclose a copy of the letter which the Archbishop addressed to the Prime Minister about this, covering the text of the resolution adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council.

I would be grateful for urgent advice on the background, the powers available to the Secretary of State for Scotland on this matter, and his current intentions as to the use of those powers.

MAP

KRR

J.S. Wilson, Esq.,  
Scottish Office.

MISS STEPHENS

*M.S.*

Iona

The Archbishop of Canterbury handed the attached letter to the Prime Minister yesterday.

I see in a Press report today that Mr Hugh Fraser is trying to buy the island, with the intention of handing it over to the National Trust for Scotland. If this came about, I imagine that this would not be regarded as a sale of the island "for commercial or sectarian purposes" and that the Church Leaders would be content.

I am not sure whether the Government has in fact any powers in the matter, but may I pass this to you/Mr Sanders so that advice can be obtained quickly for the Prime Minister.

*CVP.*

24 May 1979

Lambeth Palace, SE1 7JU.

21st May, 1979.

To Mr Peterson  
please for  
advise.  
mt.

My dear Prime Minister,

I have just returned from a meeting in  
Canada of the Anglican Consultative Council.

At that meeting great concern was  
expressed about the future of the Island of  
Iona, and the enclosed motion was passed  
unanimously. I promised to pass it on to you  
for your attention.

As the matter has about it an element of  
urgency, I am doing this immediately after my  
return. I think you will agree that even in  
the early days of your Premiership, when pressures  
on you must be very heavy, it merits your careful  
attention.

I hope you are much encouraged in your work.

With best wishes,  
Yours very sincerely,

Donald Cantuar.

The Right Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,  
10, Downing Street,  
London, S.W.1.

Private Member's Motion: The Right Hon. David W. Bleakley  
(Ireland)

"That this Anglican Consultative Council, on behalf of the Member Churches of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, and in the belief that in this matter it speaks for other Christian Churches, expresses its very great concern at the possibility of the sale of the Island of Iona for commercial or sectarian purposes.

The Council urges the British Government to take action to ensure that the present character and use of the Island is not radically altered, and that its future is secured."

END

Filmed at the National  
Archives (TNA) in London

February 2010