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Confidential filing.

Proposal to close the Public Records office

Research Room in Chancery Lane.

CIVIL SERVICE.

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830

February 1980.

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
26.2.80							
3.4.80							
22.4.80							
PREM 19/145							



with compliments

MINISTER OF STATE

CIVIL SERVICE DEPARTMENT
Whitehall London SW1A 2AZ

Telephone 01-273 5563/4086



Civil Service ✓
MAP 28/4

Civil Service Department
Whitehall London SW1A 2AZ
Telephone 01-273 3000

Minister of State

Ian Maxwell Esq
Private Secretary to the
Lord Chancellor
House of Lords
LONDON SW1A OPW

MAP
to see

22 April 1980

Dear Ian

The Minister of State has seen your letter of 2 April to Nick Sanders in No 10 about the Public Record Office contribution to the staff reductions agreed by Cabinet last autumn.

The Minister of State appreciates the difficulties but feels that it would not be right to leave this matter in abeyance. Nor should it be confused in any way with the further 2½% cut arising out of the 1.4.80 pay settlement. He hopes the Lord Chancellor will agree that they are entirely separate matters.

We are of course aware that the Public Record Office is a separate department. In suggesting that an alternative staff saving (£115,000 in 1982-83) might be found from any of the Lord Chancellor's other departments, the Minister of State drew attention to the fact that the Lord Chancellor's Department itself, the largest for which the Lord Chancellor is responsible, had contributed only about 1% to the reductions last autumn.

The Minister of State entirely appreciates the reluctance of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council to offer ready support to this economy measure. The Council includes a high proportion of mediaevalists and naturally their interests are concentrated upon the documents likely to be moved. He does feel, however, that the public debate so far has substantially misrepresented the PRO's proposal. He understands, for instance, that in the main those documents most frequently requisitioned will be held at Kew (and not therefore transported regularly), that they are far more robust than has been claimed, and that, on present plans, the Census Records (which may often be referred to during odd moments such as lunch-breaks) are likely to remain in Central London.

I am copying this letter to Nick Sanders in No 10.

Bon sincerely

G E T Green

G E T GREEN
Private Secretary

22 APR 1960



14
Civil Service

3 April, 1980.

Thank you for your letter of 2 April about the staff reductions in the Public Record Office and elsewhere in the Lord Chancellor's Department. Since it was the Lord Chancellor who raised the issue in the first instance, of course we must wait for you to give the matter further consideration. We look forward to hearing from you again.

N. J. SANDERS

Ian Maxwell, Esq.,
Lord Chancellor's Office.

GC.



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

2nd April, 1980.

P13/1/30

Der Nick,

You wrote to me on the 24th March asking for further information about the circumstances in which the decision to close the Public Record Office search rooms in Chancery Lane was taken as a result of the Government's decision to make cuts in the staff costs of all Departments.

Can we treat this matter as being for the moment in abeyance, until we can see more clearly the outcome of P.E.S. 1980, with particular reference to the further 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ % cut? Perhaps, however, I ought to clarify one point which seems to have caused some confusion: like some other public offices for which the Lord Chancellor is Ministerially responsible, the Public Record Office is a Department separate from his main Department, with its own Accounting Officer and its own Establishment Officer. Thus, when the decision was taken to consider the 10%, 15% and 20% options for all Departments, the P.R.O. was treated as a Department on its own.

A copy of this letter goes to Geoffrey Green in the Civil Service Department.

Yours sincerely
Ian Maxwell

I. Maxwell

N.J. Sanders, Esq.

-3 APR 1980





10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 March 1980

sp 31. 3. 80

Thank you for your letter of 20 March, addressed to Mike Pattison. Mike is at present on leave. In his absence, I think it might be helpful if you could let us have some further supporting information, in addition to the very helpful figures you have just provided.

The Prime Minister's view when she saw the Lord Chancellor's letter of 14 February was that it might well prove possible to find staff savings elsewhere in the Lord Chancellor's Department, and your most recent letter does not examine that issue in detail. Perhaps you could let us have a fuller justification for the original decision to make savings in the Public Records Office rather than elsewhere, a list of the savings which are at present proposed elsewhere in the Lord Chancellor's Department and a discussion of the options for further savings other than in the Public Records Office. I hope it will be possible for you to let us have this further information fairly quickly.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Geoffrey Green (Civil Service Department).

N. J. SANDERS

SP

Ian Maxwell, Esq.,
Lord Chancellor's Department.

FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

20 March, 1980

Dear Mike,

In your letter of the 25th February you asked for further particulars of the numbers involved in the manpower cuts affecting the Public Record Office.

The 1980/81 establishment for the PRO is 430. The reduction sought before the recent request for a further 2½% cut was 39½ posts by April 1982. The consequences of a further 2½% reduction have not yet been fully worked out.

The Keeper of Public Records proposes to achieve a reduction of 22 posts by closing the Chancery Lane reading rooms and making the relevant records available at Kew. The remaining reductions would be achieved as follows:-

- (a) Central Services, planning and public relations:
4½ posts (out of 41);
- (b) improvement of means of reference to records:
3 posts (out of 15);
- (c) repair of records: 10 posts (out of 42).

There are certain areas in which the reduction of services would have unacceptable consequences. No reduction in security arrangements or in the arrangements for selecting new records from departments and preparing them for the public's use could be made without serious risk of valuable material being lost. Common services cannot be reduced further unless there are changes

M. Pattison, Esq.,
Private Secretary,
10, Downing Street,
London, SW1.

/in.....

in the regulations which have to be complied with by the Civil Service generally. Further reductions in the staff required for improving means of reference (para.(b) above) would not yield more than five posts, for these staff already provide reliefs in the Chancery Lane reading rooms. Further reductions in the record repair staff (para.(c) above) would endanger the records themselves and create redundancy problems which do not arise in other sections.

Other reductions would cause a deterioration of the service to the public exceeding that resulting from the closure of Chancery Lane. The photocopying services provide copies (on a fee-paid basis) in response to orders from the public. They also make copies for use in the reading rooms when the original records have become too fragile for readers to use. Reductions in the staff employed on the processing of incoming records would lead to the rationing of records to readers. In all these cases the reduction of staff would adversely affect readers of the modern records at Kew as much as, and probably more than, the smaller number of readers at Chancery Lane.

You also asked about the possibility of saving similar numbers in other functions of the Lord Chancellor. This would not be easy, since most of the Lord Chancellor's staff work in the courts, where the needs are demand-led; the difficulty is, inevitably, increased by the requirement of an additional 2½% cut. It might be possible to save these additional posts by further cuts in the civil courts and the Land Registry, but the staff costs here are paid for by fees and a reduction in staff numbers would involve a corresponding reduction in fees and consequently no overall financial saving. Moreover, the Land Registry are already under great pressure as a result of previous cuts and any further reduction would seriously prejudice their ability to provide an adequate service to the public.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Green in Mr. Channon's office.

Yours sincerely
Ian Maxwell

I.H.Maxwell



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 20 MAR 1960

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~~6/3/80~~

25 February 1980

The Prime Minister has seen the Lord Chancellor's letter of 14 February, about the proposal to close the Public Records Office Research Room in Chancery Lane. She has also seen Mr. Channon's minute of 21 February.

The Prime Minister is reluctant to see at this stage a reduction in the staff savings agreed last year. The paper submitted at that time did not set out the specific numbers involved in respect of the Public Record Office. She would therefore like to see a more detailed presentation of the numbers in question, and of the possibilities of saving similar numbers in other functions if the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane were to remain open.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Geoffrey Green in Mr. Channon's office.

M.A. PATTISON

Ian Maxwell, Esq.,
Lord Chancellor's Office.

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PRIME MINISTER

Could we know more about the arrangements?

How many people are involved. I suspect we could find the same nos. elsewhere.

Lord Hailsham (Flag A) forecasts angry reaction to the proposed closure of the Public Record Office's Chancery Lane Research Room. He believes that the Government could be defeated in the House of Lords if the matter were to come to a vote.

Mr. Channon (Flag B) recognises the problems over the Public Record Office, but is unwilling to let Lord Hailsham reverse his decision on these staff savings without offering similar alternatives.

We are about to come to a new round of staff savings, when Cabinet considers Civil Service pay issues next week. This does seem an inopportune moment to let a Minister wriggle out of savings offered in the last exercise. Would you like to press Lord Hailsham to offer alternatives before a final decision is taken on the Public Record Office?

21 February, 1980.

PRIME MINISTER

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Quintin Hailsham sent me a copy of his letter of 14 February to you about the proposal to close the Chancery Lane Reading Room.

The option to close the Reading Room was one of several put forward by his Departments as their contribution to the recent manpower reductions exercise. If, in the light of press comment and the possible consequences of closure of the Reading Room, Quintin Hailsham would prefer not to continue with the proposal, then of course that is for him to decide.

If the proposal is abandoned, however, it will be necessary to put something in its place which will make an equivalent staff saving (£115,000 in 1982-83). If it is not possible to find this in the Public Record Office itself, I would be content with an additional contribution (of the same amount) from any of his other Departments. I know that there are many problems, but the savings in the Lord Chancellor's Department, the largest of the Departments, only amount to a little more than 1%.

There will of course be several proposals for staff savings that will be difficult to put through. But if we are to make these savings then I am sure we must stand firm, or we will find that the savings are whittled down to an unacceptable extent.

I am copying this to Quintin Hailsham.

P.C.

PAUL CHANNON

21 February 1980

21 FEB 1980



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.

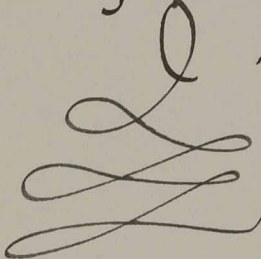
All these considerations make me think that we ought to be prepared to accept a rather smaller cut in the PRO now (sufficient to enable Chancery Lane to continue for the time being); and that priority should be given to the working out of a long-term strategy for Kew and Chancery Lane which would lead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

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