F

PRIME MINISTER

Your Visit to Correspondence Section and the Garden Rooms

You are to see something of the new system in the Correspondence Section at 9.30 on Wednesday morning. This note sets out some of the background and explains what the new system does. You last visited Correspondence Section and the Garden Rooms on the "Day of Action" in May 1980.

Background

You receive far more correspondence than any previous Prime Minister. The annual totals for the last few years are as follows:

1975	:	72,000
1976	:	67,000
1977	:	59,000
1978	:	80,000
1979	:	156,000
1980	:	140,000
1981	:	128,000
1982 up to November	:	186,000

November 1982 was in fact easily a record with some 45,000 letters being received, most of them on seals. The way this correspondence is processed is as follows. It arrives in the Garden Rooms where it is counted and opened. The Garden Rooms then decide whether to pass the letters to the Private Secretary (normally myself) to deal with or to Correspondence Section. The latter deal with the large majority. They also decide whether to pass correspondence to Political Office, Joy Robilliard, Honours, Appointments and Press Office.

In Correspondence Section the letters are read once again and the three "readers" decide what form of response should be given. This will either mean a short reply from No.10 or a reply from a Department. Only letters from persistent correspondents, abusive letters or campaign letters do not receive a reply. Until now the responses have been typed in the Correspondence Section (although

/of

of course the Garden Rooms deal with all Private Secretary
correspondence) and records of letters have been kept on paper
files.

The New System

The new system was largely arranged by Willie Rickett in
conjunction with the Central Computer and Telecommunications
Agency. I took over when Willie moved to the Parliamentary desk.
The system will cost about £55,000 and has been provided jointly
by IMTEC Equipment Limited and CASU Limited both of which are of
course British. The system was installed in September and we are
now on the point of a formal acceptance. As usual with new systems
we have had a considerable number of teething troubles.

The system broadly does two things:

i) It is a filing system. The system enables us to
recall within a matter of seconds the names of your
correspondents and to produce a copy of their letter.
This information is stored on microfilm and the mere
act of responding to a letter enters it into the system.

ii) It prints letters. Once the readers have decided
what form of response the letter is to get, the typists
enter the name and address into the computer, indicate which
reply it is to get and it is automatically printed.

The system is normally extremely efficient and enables us to
cope with the considerably increased volume of correspondence which
you receive. It should produce staff economies but we will rely
on a staff inspection sometime early next year to assess the
staffing requirement of the system. The chief advantage for the
moment however is that the system will enable us to cope with more
letters with the same staff.

You will wish to thank the staff of Correspondence Section
for their willing and indeed enthusiastic acceptance of the new
technology. They really have been marvellous. In particular

/you

you might like to have a special word of praise for Eileen Eves, who has acquired a mastery of the system which has astonished everyone including I think herself. I am hoping that when we finally get rid of the last vestiges of the old system, in particular the paper files on which the old records were kept, we shall be able to redecorate the room in which the typists work. You might like to comment on this.

After the visit to Correspondence Section we shall go to the Garden Rooms whose work is well known to you. You might like however to comment particularly on the massive correspondence exercises of the last year which have included letters about Mark, about the Falklands and of course about seals.

T. FLETCHER

30 November 1982