

PRIME MINISTER

Moon Dust

2  
minute to PM  
of 15 Jan 85

I have spoken to Dame Margaret Weston (as below) but find that she is not over-enthusiastic about having this exhibit on loan at present.

As a curiosity (ranking with a tooth-brush once used by Napoleon which they have at the Museum) they would always be very willing to give it a home if we no longer wanted the exhibit at No 10, but more significant specimens of moon rock are apparently now available from NASA if required as part of a scientific display. Dame Margaret nevertheless asked me to express her thanks to you for the kind offer.

I have noted the No 10 records accordingly, and propose that we should continue to retain the moon dust in the waiting room here.

alc.

mt

18 January 1985

PRIME MINISTER

Moon Dust

The specimens of moon dust at No 10 were mentioned during your recent visit to the Science Museum, and I have now looked up the old papers.

They were a "gift to the people of the United Kingdom" from President Nixon in 1970 when Mr Wilson was Prime Minister. After a good deal of discussion with Whitehall and with certain institutions (including the Science, Geology and Natural History Museums), it was decided that the exhibit should be placed on display in all the provincial museums in rotation, but that its permanent home should be No 10. (This decision was later endorsed by your more recent predecessors and was reported to you in 1979.) As a result of the 1970 decision, the Science Museum was asked to arrange for the exhibit to be displayed at some 20 centres in turn throughout the UK, until it was eventually returned to No 10. Since then it has once or twice been out on loan for special exhibitions, but we have had no further requests for some time.

As I think you know the exhibit has a curiosity rather than a scientific interest. There are four fragments of rock, each scarcely more than 1 mm across, encapsulated in a clear plastic hemisphere about the size of a golf ball, and mounted on a not very attractive wooden plinth along with a silk Union Jack measuring about 10 cm x 15 cm.

The Science Museum have made no further reference to the moon rock since your visit (I am not sure whether the Director overheard the conversation or whether it was merely the keeper of that particular gallery). If you wish, I will approach them informally to see whether they would like to borrow the exhibit for a further loan period, but in view of the past history I think it would be as well

not to allow these fragments of moon rock to pass into the permanent keeping of the Science Museum.

Agree that I should proceed on this basis?

Yes

OK.

15 January 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

ROBIN.

I have now  
found another  
file on the gift  
of moon-dust.

I think the Feb./Mar  
1970 correspondence  
might be helpful.  
(Later file also attached)

Susan CF.

11.1.85

MOON ROCK

PRIME MINISTER

Science Museum

Letters of thanks to both the Chairman and the Director, following today's visit, are attached for signature, please, if you agree.

I am looking up old papers on the moon rock particles which are at No 10. The plaque reveals that they were "presented to the people of the United Kingdom" by President Nixon in 1970. A number of institutions made rival claims at the time to be the permanent custodians, and to avoid arguments it was apparently decided to keep the moon rock here. I think it would be wise to check up on how that decision was reached before we commit ourselves now to hand over these specimens to the Science Museum. I will report further.

*OLC*

7 January 1985