



SUBJECT CC MASTER

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From the Private Secretary

16 March 1988

Dr Eleanor

THYSSEN COLLECTION

As agreed the Prime Minister met Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza for a drink yesterday evening. The Baron's wife was not present but Mr. Hanks-Drielsma was. Your Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment were also present.

The meeting took the form of a general chat about the possible future of the Thyssen Collection, and the variety of sites that could be found within the United Kingdom. Specific points worth recording are as follows:

(i) the Baron had not yet decided on a permanent home for the Collection and indeed he might not do so for some time. It was possible that he would go for an interim temporary solution, while negotiations continued with other members of the family on what proportion of the pictures should be given away and what proportion should be charged for;

(ii) insofar as permanent solutions were being considered, proposals had been received from various countries including Spain, Germany, Italy and America. If possible the Baron favoured Europe, but discussion on the relative merits of the European countries was not particularly conclusive;

(iii) it was agreed that there was a marginal preference for an existing beautiful building to be used but it was accepted that the costs of conversion would probably be more than the cost of building new;

(iv) the Baron agreed that he would be pleased if the United Kingdom came up with a firm proposal by around the end of April which he would then arrange to be considered. The Prime Minister commented that one should not rush these things but we would try to put a package together.

Following the Baron's and Mr. Hanks-Drielsma's departure, the meeting considered a long list of possible sites for the Collection. The one that seemed to find the most favour was Lancaster House, but it was agreed that your Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment, would consider various possibilities in conjunction with Mr. Palumbo's group. The requirement for a substantial amount

of funding to purchase the Baron's Collection was also noted at this stage. It was agreed that the various possibilities for raising this money would have to be studied very carefully, and there was no commitment to any one particular course of action.

I should also recall in this letter a couple of points that emerged later on. The first is that in the course of a dinner last night it became clear from the Baron that if we are to secure the Collection it will have to be in or very close to London and, secondly, we have had a telephone call from Mr. Hanks-Drielsma who confirmed the point about location (although he included the possibility of Birmingham) and stressed that it would be necessary to move quite quickly as there was a meeting of the Thyssen Trustees due in June - this information is I think confidential.

Action on this project now lies with your Minister, and Mr. Palumbo's group. But I know that the Chief Secretary's office will want to be kept closely in the picture with regard to any possible expenditure of public funds, and the Department of the Environment will continue to advise on possible buildings. I know that the Prime Minister would also like to be kept in touch with the progress in negotiations.

There are two further specific points. The first is the position of Mr. Hanks-Drielsma. My original impression had been that he was acting on behalf of the Baron, but the events of the last 24 hours suggest that this is not the case, and that his view is that he is acting on behalf of the British Government in negotiating with Baron Thyssen. You will doubtless wish to consider whether this is the most appropriate way to proceed. And, lastly, the Prime Minister did indicate an interest in possibly visiting the current exhibition of Baron Thyssen's paintings. Could you please let me know the exact dates of this, and who I should contact if it is possible to find a time for her to visit it.

I am copying this letter to Jill Rutter (Chief Secretary's Office), Deborah Lamb (Department of the Environment) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

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(P. A. BEARPARK)

Miss Eleanor Goodison,
Office of Arts and Libraries.