

Ref. A088/2212

NOTE FOR RECORD

cc Mr Morris, No 10  
 Mr Catford, No 10  
 Mr Wilding, OAL

Call by the Reverend Professor Owen Chadwick

The Reverend Professor Owen Chadwick called on Sir Robin Butler by appointment on the morning of 18 July. The main points of the discussion follow.

2. Professor Chadwick opened by inquiring whether the Thyssen Trustees had yet decided on the future of the Collection. Sir Robin replied that the Trustees had met the previous week and the Government might be able to say something shortly; but matters were not that simple. The Baron had signed a Memorandum of Understanding undertaking to loan the Collection to Spain, which was of dubious legal enforceability, but which none the less the Baron and the Trustess considered engaged their goodwill and honour. It was not at all sure, however, that the Spanish would be able to make anything of the position this offered them, since there were differing views in their Government and they were, furthermore, short of funds for such purposes. The Baron, his family and the Trustees, to differing degrees, had been genuinely impressed by the British proposal, and had seemed to like the idea that Britain might offer the final home for the Collection. There was therefore a strong possibility that should the Spanish fail to take up the proposal for the loan, or fail to extend this to offering a permanent home for the Collection, they might look to Britain for a solution.

3. Professor Chadwick said that a problem which the episode had thrown up for him and his fellow Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery resulted from Sir Hugh Casson's judgment that Baron Thyssen might be moved in favour of the British proposal if he were granted the use of the National Portrait Gallery building to house his Collection. Sir Hugh had spoken to Lord Kenyon and the Director of the Gallery who to varying degrees had been enthusiastic. (The Director, for instance, very much favoured a move to a purpose built building on the Kings Cross site; Lord Kenyon very much favoured a move to Somerset House.) The Trustees had not had a chance to carry out a critique of such a proposal, but would meet on Thursday when their views could be made known. It was Professor Chadwick's view that any proposal to move would meet with considerable opposition amongst the Trustees (the advantages of a move to a purpose built site would be balanced against the historical situation enjoyed in the present building; and many of the Trustees shared the Director's view that Somerset House - with a myriad of small rooms - would be unsuitable for a gallery of the type required). Sir Robin assured Professor Chadwick that the proposal to lodge the Thyssen Collection in the National Gallery had not been initiated or formally considered by the Government; and it had not been among the options put to the Thyssen Trustees. It was unlikely to be pursued unless there was a prospect of the Thyssen Collection coming to the United Kingdom and the Thyssen Trustees favoured it; and this combination of possibilities was remote at present.

4. Professor Chadwick welcomed this and said that this meant that the Trustees' job was to get ahead with the proposal for the Gallery extension. The support offered by the Prime Minister (in the form of a message to be included in the brochure) and by the Office of Arts and Libraries was very much appreciated; and an architect had now been chosen. Sir Robin said that he felt that the uncertainty created by speculation about the use of the National Portrait Gallery building to house

the Thyssen Collection would best be allowed to settle prior to launching the Appeal - and that would not be very long once the Trustees' decision was made known. However, on a more practical note, he had been advised that the OAL were still awaiting some information, in particular to be able to go to the Treasury for formal approval to proceed (with the proposition that they would offer £2 million if the Trustees were able to raise £10 million) and he suggested that the Trustees should get on with providing this. Professor Chadwick seemed mildly taken aback, asserting that he thought that the proposition was in no doubt. Sir Robin said that he was not suggesting that there was any difficulty, but it was necessary for the formal clearance to be gone through with the Treasury (for the Government to be assured of appropriate administration etc.).

5. Professor Chadwick said that if they were to back the suggestion to hold up the project while the Thyssen dust settled, would there be any mileage in approaching the Prime Minister to attend a later lunch than the one which she had earlier declined on diary grounds, assuming that she had declined on diary grounds rather than for other, perfectly understandable, reasons of not wishing to set a precedent? Sir Robin said that he had not asked the Prime Minister himself, but understood that she had previously declined only on diary grounds. If the lunch was being rearranged for next year, it would be worth inviting the prime Minister again. On the other hand, he advised, it would not be wise to determine the timing of the lunch by this consideration, since the Prime Minister would have to consider the invitation among many other calls on her time and her acceptance would always be a long shot.

6. Professor Chadwick raised the question of approaching both the Prince of Wales and Sir Mark Weinberg to serve as Trustees for the Appeal. He had heard from one of the industrialists on the Board of Trustees that the latter was "discontented" at the Tate Galley, and thought that he might therefore be persuaded

to head the extension Appeal. Sir Robin said that Professor Chadwick should talk to Mr Catford about these questions, since he was in the best position to guide him on them.

7. Professor Chadwick raised an Honours matter which is recorded separately.

P.C.B.

PAUL CUTHBERT-BROWN

Cabinet Office  
20 July 1988