



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

21 March 1985

Dear Richard,

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act

You will have received from Number 10 a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from the Australian Prime Minister, seeking the permanent loan of one of the original copies of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act in connection with the Australian Bicentenary in 1988.

In view of the fact that this request comes from a Commonwealth Prime Minister in connection with a major centenary celebration, the Foreign Secretary hopes that we shall be able to go as far to meet the Australians as possible.

Our family ties and our shared social, legal, ethnical, political and constitutional heritage make Australia a country with which our relations are warm and close at all levels and in all fields. But it is a country which, in the modern world, we cannot take for granted. The Australian Bicentenary, which will commemorate the European settlement of Australia, will therefore be an important event both for Australians and for Anglo-Australian relations. It is clearly right and very much in the national interest that Britain's contribution to Australia's heritage, institutions and development should be firmly emphasised and properly recognised in the celebrations.

We have been considering what form the British Government's contribution should take, given the pressure on public funds. The permanent loan of one of the original copies of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, which are documents of great historical and symbolic value in Australia, would provide a very fitting gift. We recognise, however, that this might create difficult precedents since such documents in the House of Lords or National Archive have rarely, if ever, been parted with.

If permanent loan is out of the question, the best alternative would seem to be a temporary loan of one of the documents for the duration of the Bicentenary Year 1988, together with the gift of a good facsimile. Senior officials from my Department have already been in touch with the Keeper of the Public Records, who was reluctant to agree to a lengthy loan of the National Archive copy but thought that a short term loan might well be possible.

/ You....



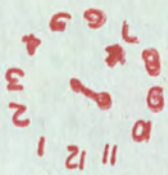
You may remember that we lent an original copy of the Magna Carta to the United States for their Bicentenary in 1976, while presenting them a facsimile. A fine facsimile of the original Australian document on vellum, exactly as the original, and authenticated by the Clerk of the Parliaments, might be acceptable to the Australians if one of the originals could be lent to them for their Bicentenary year. We might aim to provide a suitable display case, though not the elaborate gold setting, costing £100,000, which was given to the Americans.

As you know, the Lord Chancellor is already involved with the Bicentenary as a Vice-President of the British Australian Bicentennial Committee which has been set up under the Chairmanship of Sir Peter Gadsden to coordinate Britain's contribution. The Foreign Secretary would be most grateful if the Lord Chancellor could now give sympathetic consideration to the Australian request, and to the proposals set out above.

I am sending a copy of this letter to No 10, with a recommendation that a holding reply be sent to the Australian Prime Minister while the matter is being considered.

Yours ever,
Len Appleyard
(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

Richard Stoate Esq
Private Secretary to
The Lord Chancellor.



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