

E.R.

Defence.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Chatham Dockyard

In conversation at dinner after her tour of the National Maritime Museum yesterday, the Prime Minister was regaled by the Honourable Anthony Cayzer (Chairman) and Dr Basil Greenhill (Director) with a long account of their fears for the future of the historic enclave at Chatham after the dockyard closes in about April 1984. Apparently this embodies some 72 acres including an "untouched Victorian dockyard" and a ropewalk. This has always been within the naval perimeter and not seen by the general public. The National Maritime Museum feels very strongly that this should be preserved as a monument for the nation, and Mr Michael Heseltine - until recently Secretary of State for the Environment - was believed to support this. He apparently had commissioned a consultant's report, with the intention that the buildings of historical interest should be preserved with maximum accessibility to the public and that a trust should be established to take over the management and perpetual maintenance of the site.

The National Maritime Museum agreed in principle with this approach and, indeed, had suggested a number of names as future trustees. Their main concern now was that a responsible body ought to be formed immediately, in order to preserve continuity. At the very least it was essential that the new trust should be fully functioning before any part of the present dockyard was vacated so that there should be no risk of encroachment or vandalism from outside. But they also feared "official vandalism" which might already be occurring if any of the existing equipment or appointments was being removed and dispersed to other places. They saw it as vital for everything to be preserved intact.

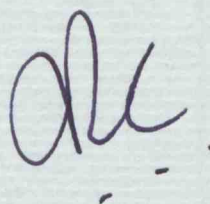
The Prime Minister was told that there had been various suggestions about the nature and composition of the future trust, such as that it might be a tripartite organisation involving "ancient monuments", private sector and local government interests. But all this was taking time and the risk of a hiatus was now looming. This could have alarming consequences. The National Maritime Museum was not against private sector involvement but specious arguments had been heard about the entertainment potential of the area, and they very

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much hoped that there would be full respect for Chatham dockyard as a historical monument before any other considerations were allowed in.

The Prime Minister was told that the new Secretary of State, Tom King, with officials from the Permanent Secretary downwards, would be visiting Greenwich later this week for a further discussion. There was no suggestion that he would depart from the line of his predecessor, although this had not yet been confirmed. The Prime Minister expressed considerable interest in this development and asked me - in the presence of Mr Cayzer and Dr Greenhill - to let the Secretary of State's office know this and that she was "in full cry" (her words).

After a further word with Dr Greenhill on the telephone today to confirm my understanding of certain details, I then telephoned David Edmonds in the Secretary of State's office and subsequently wrote him a confirmatory letter as attached. He told me that the Secretary of State and officials were in fact lunching there today, and promised to provide a note later in the week.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'de' followed by a flourish and a period.

15 March 1983

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Chatham Dockyard

As I mentioned on the telephone, the Prime Minister yesterday evening fulfilled a long-standing engagement to tour the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. In the course of the visit the Chairman, the Honourable Anthony Cayzer, and the Director, Dr Basil Greenhill, spoke at some length of their fears for the future of the historic enclave at Chatham after the dockyard closes next year.

The Prime Minister is aware that the matter is under active consideration by your Secretary of State, and indeed was told that he will be visiting Greenwich tomorrow to discuss possible arrangements for setting up a trust at Chatham. She has asked that the Secretary of State should be made aware of her considerable interest in the matter.

Perhaps you would kindly let me have a short note on the background to this, together with an indication of how matters stand following tomorrow's meeting at Greenwich.

ROBIN CATFORD

David Edmonds Esq
Department of the Environment

Defence

16 March 1983

I know that the Prime Minister will be writing to you herself, but I wanted to add my own grateful thanks for the highly enjoyable evening at the Museum on Monday. It was a great privilege to be there and everyone in her party was most appreciative of your generous hospitality and very kind way in which the Museum staff explained the exhibits to us.

You have possibly heard that I had a further word with Dr Greenhill yesterday about the future of the historical buildings at Chatham after the dockyard closes. The Prime Minister is, of course, aware that you are about to have further discussions with the Secretary of State on this, and she will be following developments with interest.

May I also take this opportunity to refer to the matter of the Haley portrait which was mentioned at dinner? We are most grateful for the portrait of Nelson which is already on loan to No 10, and if you also felt able to lend us a painting of a notable British astronomer such as Haley this would indeed be most welcome. If in principle this is a possibility, it would be helpful first to know the approximate size of the picture since obviously this would be one factor in deciding whether we could hang it in a suitable setting.

ROBIN CATFORD

The Honourable Anthony Cayzer