



Prime Minister

N. C. U.

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Ref. A088/1796

MR WICKS

Thyssen: The Times Story

The lead story in The Times about the United Kingdom's proposal for the future of the Thyssen pictures came from the Baron's reception and dinner in Lugano on Saturday evening to mark the opening of an exhibition of Russian art. I have had an account of how it came about from Mr Hanks-Drielsma, who was present.

2. There was a substantial amount of talk about the United Kingdom's offer at the reception and the dinner at which a correspondent of The Times was present. At the dinner the Baron in his speech mentioned the United Kingdom among other countries with whom he had had discussions. The Baron introduced Mr Hanks-Drielsma to the leading member of the local canton, in front of The Times correspondent, saying that Mr Hanks-Drielsma was the protagonist for locating the Collection in London. The Baron's Public Relations Officer told Mr Hanks-Drielsma, again in front of the correspondent of The Times, that she was beginning to receive press inquiries - she in particular mentioned "The Independent" - about the proposal from the British Government. Later in the evening the Baron showed the Prime Minister's personal letter to a number of his guests. Judging that the correspondent from The Times had enough to write a story, Sir Peter Smithers and Mr Hanks-Drielsma decided late on Saturday night that they would brief him on the correct story, and they left a message at his hotel asking him to call on Sir Peter Smithers on Sunday morning. The story in the Times is undoubtedly the result of their briefing.



3. If the story was to break there appears to be some advantages in the way it has happened. It demonstrably came from Lugano rather than from London. The way in which the correspondent of The Times has presented the story, as a result of the briefing from Sir Peter Swithers, is positive and helpful. The details of the British proposal have not been supplied.

4. Given this, it appears that we can follow a press line close to that which we always envisaged, namely to confirm that the British Government, like some other countries, has made proposals for the future of the Collection, given its unique quality and the desire of the Baron and the Trustees to find a long-term location for it; that the details of the proposals should remain confidential while the discussions are in progress; and that the proposals will be subject to Parliamentary approval in due course, if successful. On sites, The Times mentions Docklands and Birmingham, and the press will no doubt be able to confirm this by enquiries in Docklands and Birmingham, but it seems better that the Government should say no more than that we have naturally suggested some sites taking account of earlier discussions with the Baron about his preferences but decline to say anything further for the time being. A brief is being prepared for the Press Officer for the Minister for the Arts, who is answering Parliamentary Questions today, and for the Prime Minister for tomorrow's Prime Minister's Questions. I have also asked Mr Hanks-Drielsma to arrange that either he or Mr Robert Alexander let the Baron know that the story has broken from Lugano and that our Ministers are likely to have to comment on the lines above, which I mentioned to the Baron when I presented the original proposal.

Confirm proposal details confidentially with discussion. Should have been expressed in Parliamentary approval required.



5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Attorney General and the Minister for the Arts.

R.R.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

13 June 1988



10 DOWNING STREET

~~Dominic,~~

Sir Hugh Leggate
delivered this by hand
on Saturday, then telephoned
to say that he had
withdrawn the original
letter from the Times!!

CF
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Thanks. No action
necessary. Put with
Thynne papers

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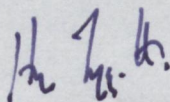
Sir,

I could be mistaken but I do not believe that our own public museums and galleries will suffer even further financial deprivation than they do at present if the Government is successful in obtaining for this country Baron Thyssen's splendid collection.

In wholeheartedly supporting the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister in their initiative, may I make one point: the decision as to the venue should surely be Baron Thyssen's.

However, I have put forward the suggestion that the Government might consider offering the most prestigious site of all - that of the National Portrait Gallery, adjoining the National Gallery itself, in Trafalgar Square. Naturally this would entail the reconstruction of the site and a new building for the National Portrait Gallery, but this is precisely what the Trustees have been advocating for many years.

Yours faithfully,



Sir Hugh Leggatt

The Editor,
The Times