

295/10

PUS/B/5338/MLR

Secretary of State (L&B)

WJ
23/10

cc / Sir Ewart Bell ✓
Mr Blackwell
Miss Owens
PS/PUS(L)

2 NISC/1

ROYAL VISITS TO NORTHERN IRELAND

1. We shall be meeting early in November to discuss Royal Visits to Northern Ireland. This note sets out our general policy in this field and lists those Royal Visits that are currently planned.

2. Members of the Royal Family do not accept invitations to visit Northern Ireland unless they have consulted the Secretary of State and satisfied themselves that he is content from the point of view of security, political sensitivity and timing. In practice we have a close relationship with the Royal Private Secretaries and proposed visits are co-ordinated at an early stage, whether the initiative comes from the Royal Household, the NIO, the Armed Forces or civilian bodies in Northern Ireland.

3. Royal Visits fall into two main categories; "civil" visits and "military" visits. "Civil" visits involve the Royal Visitor in the same sort of functions as are performed in the remainder of the United Kingdom; garden parties at Hillsborough Castle; opening new schools, hospital wings, factories, etc; visiting factories, colleges and the like. They differ from similar occasions in Great Britain in that, because of security considerations, there is rarely a prior announcement of the Royal Visit and usually the Secretary of State or his wife is said to be the VIP due to carry out the engagement. This is often a transparent deception, but the policy is to refuse to comment on speculation that the VIP is in fact to be a member of the Royal Family. Selected members of the media are given a privileged, confidential briefing a few days before

the event so that good media coverage is provided despite the general secrecy. There is a particular problem about the City Hall, Belfast, where many civic functions are traditionally held. This could only be made accessible to a Royal Visitor at the cost of a vast security operation and we have, therefore, been obliged on a number of occasions to advise against acceptance of an invitation to functions there. You are required to receive Royal Visitors and there may be functions, such as a dinner at Hillsborough, which will involve both you and Mrs Hurd.

4. "Military" visits involve units of the Armed Forces, though these may sometimes be mixed with other functions. Members of the Royal Family are very keen to visit those units of the Armed Forces serving in Northern Ireland of which they are Colonel-in-Chief or with which they have some special link. Every Commanding Officer wants a Royal Visit to his unit while it is serving in Northern Ireland. The policy is that all bids for Royal Visits should be addressed in the first instance to the GOC who seeks approval from the Secretary of State for those which he wishes to go ahead. Occasionally in the past strings have been pulled and short cuts taken; but generally we now have things under control between HQ Northern Ireland, the Royal Private Secretaries and the NIO. There are special sensitivities concerning "military" visits; some barracks and some units are anathema to many nationalists and a Royal Visit to one of them can risk involving the Royal Family in political controversy. (Early this year a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh to the Grenadier Guards at Drummadd Barracks, which also houses a UDR battalion several members of which were charged with murdering Catholics, caused much criticism from nationalists and Dublin). We monitor proposals for visits very carefully to avoid controversy if possible. "Military" visits are usually secret and private with little or no publicity. There is usually no need for you to be involved.

5. Too many Royal Visits can cause unease in the nationalist side of the community because of the boost they give to Unionist

morale and the opportunity they provide for demonstrating allegiance to the Crown. They also place a considerable burden on the security forces.

As a rule of thumb we aim to arrange one major Royal Visit (spread over at least two days and usually consisting of "civil" and "military" engagements, with the Royal Visitor staying overnight in the Royal Apartments at Hillsborough Castle) in the spring or early summer and another in the early autumn. In addition we normally approve three or four private "military" visits in a year and perhaps one one-day "civil" visit.

6.

7. The machinery for arranging and co-ordinating Royal Visits on your behalf is directly controlled by the Permanent Under Secretary, advised by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Mr Blackwell handles the details at the London end and Miss Owens in Belfast. The numbers involved are very small to limit the "need to know" circle and all material is handled on a SECRET and PERSONAL basis.

8. The Royal Family normally arrange their programmes six months ahead and there are programme planning meetings in December/January and in May/June. They rarely undertake engagements in July and August.

9. Present plans for Royal Visits are as follows:

23 January 1985 HRH Duchess of Kent names a ship at Harland & Wolff; visits RUC and meets members of 4/7th Dragoon Guards.
(NB There may be a request for the Duchess to arrive late pm 22 January and stay overnight at Hillsborough Castle which would provide an opportunity for you and Mrs Hurd to host a small private dinner party in her honour).

June 1985
(date not yet agreed) Prince Michael of Kent (possibly with Princess Michael) is provisionally committed to visiting SSAFA (NI) in connection with their centenary. It is proposed that they attend a Hillsborough Castle Garden Party.

Autumn 1985 The Duke of Edinburgh may visit Northern Ireland in connection with the 125th Anniversary of the Army Cadet Force and the International Year of Youth.

18 October 1984


R J ANDREW