

PA - Famine file
1991

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cc Mr Bell
Mr Leach
Mr Wathens
Mr Cavanagh



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Telephone: 0171

Mr. C. Garsas

Der file

22 January 1996

S. 26 / 1.

John Dew
Dublin

2. Mrs Sear
for papers 23/1

Dear John,

Mr Cavanagh

S. 26/1.

PRESIDENT ROBINSON'S VISIT TO UK: PROGRAMME IDEAS

1. Representatives of Protocol Department, NIO, GHF and RID met this morning for a preliminary discussion of President Robinson's visit. I list below a number of the possible elements for inclusion in the programme. We would be grateful for your views and any additional suggestions.

Definite

Lunch at Buckingham Palace (6 June)

We are awaiting advice from the Palace on likely numbers; previous visits have generally involved about 16, including spouses.

Lunch hosted by Prime Minister (5 June)

Guest list no more than 65; spouses likely to be included.

Dinner hosted by Irish Ambassador

Guest list for Irish side to select, but a likely opportunity for Secretary of State to meet President Robinson, since he is not available for most of day-time period.

Possible

City of London Dinner/Lunch

Often a part of Guest of Government visits; less formal than when part of a State Visit. If included, occasion for major speech. Given the long lead-in time required, Protocol Dept advise early, informal sounding-out of the Corporation of London if we decide to recommend inclusion to the Irish.

Tea at Highgrove with Prince of Wales

The Prince of Wales' diary is almost full for the week of the visit, but his Private Office believe he would want to meet the President. They have mentioned the possibility of a call at St

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James's Palace at 1630 on 4 June, or alternatively tea at Highgrove on 6 June. Even with helicopter transport this would still take a large chunk out of the programme, however.

Calls on President at her Hotel by:

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Visit to House of Commons

Prime Minister's Question Time could be awkward because of limitations on space for party of senior visitors. But could be arranged if President Robinson was keen. Also possible would be a separate meeting/informal talk with interested parliamentarians (including members of the BIIPB) in, for example, the Grand Committee Room.

Hospitality/Call on President by Lord Chancellor

Possible visit/reception/dinner at one of Inns of Court. Lord Chancellor interested in Ireland; would match President Robinson's own interest in legal affairs. Further idea is admission as honorary bencher in one of the Inns of Court; this would involve a dinner, preferably attended by the Lord Chancellor.

Chatham House

Likely to be very enthusiastic.

Ecumenical Service to commemorate the Famine

(see para 2 below)

Visit to Community Centres/Meetings with Irish Community/Other Non Governmental Voluntary Bodies

The Irish Centre in London has recently received a grant from the Lottery fund, and Mrs Bottomley might wish to be involved in a visit to the Centre. But the Irish side may well have other proposals.

Visit to British Council

The British Council would like to make a presentation on their future plans to the President. If time does not allow a visit to the Council Headquarters, then we would hope to include British Council representatives in other parts of the programme.

Involvement of Irish Guards

We are, as you know, fully seized of the attractions of

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involving the Irish Guards in the programme.

Travel Outside London

We believe that because of town twinning, Institute of Irish Studies, large Irish community, as well as variety of other attractions not directly linked to Ireland, Liverpool would be the best option, irrespective of the decision on an ecumenical service. According to our records, President Robinson has not visited the city since she received an honorary degree there in 1991.

2. A meeting in the VCR room on 16 January gave us and IPL a chance to exchange views with David Watkins, John McKerville, and Tony Canavan on the proposal to arrange an ecumenical service to commemorate the famine. I have written separately to consult the Ambassador on a further draft for a submission to the Secretary of State. Since there is likely to be further consultation with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and perhaps with key opinion-formers before a final decision is taken, we may not be holding our first programme meeting with the Irish Embassy before the second half of February. But Protocol Department advise that we are still well ahead of the usual planning schedule.

3. One further consideration is the length of the visit - the only firm dates are 5 and 6 June. Three days is the standard timespan for a Guest of Government visit, although they can be longer. Working for the time being on a three-day model, we expect that a Wednesday to Friday programme would be preferred to a Tuesday to Thursday one, as it places the No 10 talks and lunch at the start of the visit. If so, Friday would probably be outside London; this is in any case a bad day for seeing ministers here.

Yours ever

Kate

Kate Vineall (Mrs)
Republic of Ireland Department

cc Mrs MacAdam, Protocol Department
Ms Checksfield, NIO
Mr Hallett, RAD

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199