



Government of Northern Ireland
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE
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Stormont
BELFAST BT4 3SY

Your reference

Our reference

Date

/ April 1977

Dear Ronnie

DESTRUCTION OF SPEAKERS' ROBES

I am sorry for the delay in replying to your letter of 25 January.

The Department has made what is known as a gratuitous deposit of these robes with the Ulster Museum, and a claim for compensation for their loss would only be successful if the Department could show that the destruction of the robes was a consequence of some negligent act or breach of the Agreement by the Ulster Museum.

It is unlikely that the Department has sufficient information to show that security at Malone House was so inadequate, and the threat of attack so great, that no prudent person would have stored valuable goods there. It may not be possible to obtain this information, but if the Museum's criminal injury claim is rejected or compensation reduced on these grounds then this aspect could be looked at again.

It may be that the keeping of the robes in a place other than in the Museum constituted a breach of the Agreement. On the other hand it is clear from your letter of 7 February 1974 to the Director of the Museum that the Department's concern in making the deposit is with the manner, rather than the place, in which the robes are stored. However both your letter and the receipt signed by Judson do refer to safe custody in the Ulster Museum, and so it may be that the Department could successfully contend that there has been a breach of the Agreement. I do not know the terms on which the robes were lodged in Malone House, but if it were to be shown that the Ulster Museum had relinquished custody and control of the robes to the National Trust then I would be much less hesitant in saying that there was a breach of the Agreement.

Such a breach in itself does not entitle the injured party to compensation; it must be shown that the loss of the robes flowed from that breach. This means that the Museum would be liable to indemnify the Department if the Museum in depositing the robes in Malone House ought to have known that it was not unlikely that Malone House and its contents would be destroyed by terrorist activity. This takes us back to the point made above about negligence, and could be a difficult proposition for which to find support.

As things are, unless further information can be obtained to point in the direction I have indicated, the Department would appear to have little chance of recovering its loss from the Ulster Museum.

*Yours sincerely
Max Reid*

25 January 1977

W E M Reid Esq
Solicitor
Department of Finance
Permanent House
21-23 Arthur Street
BELFAST
BT1 4GA

Destruction of Speakers' Robes

Thank you for your letter of 23 December 1976 on the above matter. I have written to the Director of the Ulster Museum on the lines indicated by you.

I shall be grateful for your advice as to whether the Department would have any claim against the Museum in respect of the destruction of the Robes.

The relevant facts are that my Department (of the Assembly) wrote to the Director on 7 February 1974, asking the Museum to take the Robes into safe custody in the Museum. (See copy of letter attached)

The Museum agreed and collected the Robes from Parliament Buildings on 13 February 1974, giving a receipt worded as follows:-

"

Speakers' State Robes

Collected on 13 February 1974 on behalf of Ulster Museum where they will be kept in safe custody (in black Japan boxes with keys).

Signed J Judson

"

Certainly I did not anticipate, nor was I ever advised, that the Robes were not being stored in the Museum Building. On the other hand, I do not think that I would have been concerned at all had I known that in fact the Robes were being stored in Malone House.

I am assured by the Director of the Ulster Museum that the Robes were not on display, in accordance with our direction.



Ulster Museum
Botanic Gardens Belfast
Belfast BT9 5AB. 0232/668251-5

6 January 1976

K. Blackburn Esq. ,
The Clerk to the Assembly,
Stormont,
Belfast BT4 3SY.

Dear Mr. Blackburn,

Thank you for your letter of 5 January letting me know the present position with regard to the compensation situation. The Museum will be pursuing its claim through the Department of Education *and* the Department of Finance may wish to add its amount to the Museum total, or deal directly with the Department of Education. I don't think it really matters which way as long as all parties know and no duplication takes place!

The robes were stored at Malone House with the remainder of our costume and textile collection. We had developed very good storage and conservation facilities on the upper floor of this building. They were not on display there.

Yours sincerely,

Director