

**Churchill Archives Centre  
Churchill College, Cambridge**

Mr James Strachan  
Secretary to 30-Year Rule Review

*Dear Mr Strachan,*

**Formal Response of the Churchill Archives Centre to the 30-Year Rule Review**

The Churchill Archives Centre holds the personal papers of the Rt. Hon. Baroness Thatcher and many of her political contemporaries. These are private collections, but often contain official material. The Centre has an agreement with the Cabinet Office to ensure that official documents or series that would be closed under existing procedures or FOI exemptions remain closed at the Churchill Archives Centre. It will remain our policy to seek and implement Cabinet Office advice with regard to official material. The Archives Centre does not seek to impose a routine thirty year closure period on material passing into its custody, and favours opening materials wherever possible, though occasionally the Centre has used thirty year closures where FOI exemptions, data protection legislation, or the agreement with the depositor/owner identify such a closure period as being relevant and appropriate.

The main impact for the Churchill Archives Centre of any change in the thirty year rule is the potential impact on the papers of the Rt. Hon. Baroness Thatcher. These are owned by the Margaret Thatcher Archive Trust, and are preserved and processed by the Churchill Archives Centre in accordance with an overall strategy set by the Trust, and co-ordinated with the Cabinet Office. The existing understanding between the parties is that the Thatcher Papers relating to the period of her Premiership (1979-90) will open in tandem with the opening of material at the National Archives, unless specific FOI or data protection exemptions apply. This means that the current opening policy is based very firmly on the thirty year rule, and that accordingly there may be a significant impact for the Churchill Archives Centre should your Review recommend a wholesale change to the rule. The Trust and the Archives Centre will need to assess whether it is appropriate for them to continue to co-ordinate the opening of material with openings in the National Archives, and to examine whether they have the resources to do this.

The Churchill Archives Centre does not speak for Baroness Thatcher, and it is expected that she will make her own response to the Review.

In our view the Review will need to consider issues of confidence, to what extent politicians and civil servants who created documents under the existing system have a right to expect that the thirty year period will be honoured. This has an effect on the Churchill Archives Centre where private depositors have placed papers with us on the understanding that certain materials will remain closed for a set period, and frequently it is only on such terms that depositors will consider handing over their political papers.

In our view the Review will also need to consider whether any proposed changes to the thirty year rule also necessitate changes to the Freedom of Information Act, where many of the exemptions are quite deliberately tied to a thirty year closure period. It would of course be possible to alter the transfer and opening period for most series of records, while maintaining the existing FOI exemptions, thereby allowing certain classes of material to remain closed for a thirty year period.

The main point that the Churchill Archives Centre would wish to make is to remind the Review that their actions will go beyond central government and its departments and impact on institutions like the Centre which are outside direct government control. While it is to be expected that staff resources can be made available for implementation of any changes within government, it is equally essential that Cabinet Office staff resources be made available to help institutions like the Archives Centre deal with any earlier openings associated with the outcome of this review. The Centre is currently reliant on Cabinet Office review and recommendation with regard to closed official material, and, if we are to continue to co-ordinate our releases with the National Archives, we would want to ensure that the Cabinet Office was in a position to review material and offer support in accordance with the revised timescales.

The opening of closed material within files is a hugely laborious process as within our collections the issue of 'restricted access' frequently applies to individual files rather than whole classes of records and this might involve referral to the Cabinet Office, re-review, and updating catalogues and other collection information. The more time we have to implement these changes ahead of a revised opening, the greater the prospect that we will be able to co-ordinate our response effectively with that of the National Archives. We would therefore ask the Review to consider recommending a reasonable preparation period before the introduction of any revised transfer date.

*Yours sincerely,*

Allen

*Allen Packwood  
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