

Chairman
PROFESSOR ANTHONY STOCKWELL
Hon. Secretary
RHIANNON MARKLESS
Hon. Treasurer
PETER BROWN
Volunteers' Co-ordinator
DR LESLEY BOATWRIGHT



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
RUSKIN AVENUE
KEW
SURREY
TW9 4DU

Tel: 020 8392 5330 ext.2226

President: THE RT. HON. LORD BINGHAM OF CORNHILL

Mr James Strachan
Secretary
30-year Rule Review
c/o The National Archives
Kew
TW9 4DU

tony@ajstockwell.co.uk

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Dear James,

Thank you for your letter of 31 December inviting the Friends to participate in the consultation relating to the review of the '30-year rule'.

The objects of the Friends are to educate the public in the knowledge of the public records and to promote support for, and assist the work of, The National Archives. Bearing in mind these complementary objectives, we are anxious that any alteration in existing arrangements should be executed to the satisfaction of both readers and staff. Reduction in the rule from, say, 30 to 20 years, or even by as little as 5 years, will bring to Kew more users and more archives; indeed, several kilometres more. When in 1968 the '50-year rule' was reduced to 30 years and, hard on the heels of this change, papers for the whole of the Second World War were released, readers gained access to material which had been rushed through. Pressures to deliver meant that much of it was perfunctorily catalogued and, in some instances, it was barely usable. A young academic at the time, I remember it well and I am told that there are members of staff who still bear the scars.

It is, therefore, imperative to assess in advance the likely demands on people and space, and to set aside time and resource for a smooth transition. We would urge that sufficient personnel and a reasonable lead time are made available to complete vital stages in the process. The first of these will be the work of teams in Whitehall departments who will be responsible for assembling and describing material, and getting it into shape for despatch to TNA. The second will see the completion of cataloguing at Kew and the in-put of a myriad of new entries on-line.

The Council of the Friends will be happy to assist further should the Review wish to call upon us.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anthony Stockwell
Chair, Friends of The National Archives