



# POST OFFICE VEHICLE CLUB

Hon. Editor: Christopher Hogan, 124 Shenstone Avenue, Norton, STOURBRIDGE, West Midlands, DY8 3EJ.

26<sup>th</sup> February 2008

James Strachan,  
Secretary to the 30-Year Rule Review,  
c/o The National Archives,  
KEW,  
TW9 4DU.

Dear Mr Strachan,

## THIRTY-YEAR RULE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

We are grateful for the opportunity to input the Club's view on the review of the Thirty Year Rule applied to Public Records retained under the Public Record Act of 1958 ("the 1958 Act"). We are active researchers in Public Record Offices, the BT and Royal Mail Archives and the National Archives to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the vehicles operated by the General Post Office up to 1969, and its successors.

The effect of the coming into effect of section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the 2000 Act") in 2005 has created a three-stage system for public records, as follows:

1. Current public records, not yet retained under the 1958 Act, whose disclosure can be requested under section 1 of the 2000 Act subject to a number of exemptions under sections 21 to 44 of the Act. Because the information is current, or has not been archived, it is likely that more information will be available to a researcher under the 2000 Act than later when the same material falls under the 1958 Act.
2. Archived public records, retained under the 1958 Act, whose release is not normally permitted under the 1958 Act if it, or other information in the file, is less than thirty years old.
3. Archived public records, retained under the 1958 Act, and more than thirty years old and open to public research.

It does seem to us, that the effect of the 1958 and 2000 Acts has been to create this three stage system where information archived but less than thirty years old is available on a more restricted basis than either current (non-archived) or archived information more than thirty years old.

This position seems to us to be an anomaly that ought to be resolved by making it easier to use section 1 of the 2000 Act to research material archived under category (2) above. Some public record offices have been very good in cataloguing material they hold that falls into category (2) but we suspect that other record offices have been less diligent in this area as no category (2) material is listed on their websites and catalogues. We therefore believe that the easiest way to allow greater availability to such material would be to place a duty on all public record offices to

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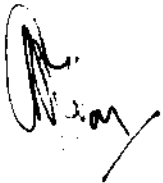
catalogue all material held within a reasonable period of time after deposition. We would also like to see more flexibility applied to section 1 requests of such material, in particular not redacting the names of every individual listed in a particular document but rather restricting such action to individuals whose personal details would cause difficulty or embarrassment in the spirit of the 2000 Act. Another action would be that once released under the 2000 Act, that any "closed" document should be regarded as permanently open on the same basis as the section 1 request (again, some record offices already do this).

We believe that these straightforward changes of emphasis would allow greater access to archived material closed under the 1958 Act. We would be supportive of reducing the current thirty-year rule to a lower limit, but we believe that greater access under the 2000 Act would allow the current rule to become largely academic anyway.

Finally, before we close, I would like to draw attention to the situation with regard to public records where their creator, the DVLA, refuses to grant any access under either the 1958 or 2000 Acts. The registers of registration books created by local authorities under the Motor Car Act of 1903 (and subsequent legislation) continue to be a very important source of data on motor vehicles for the period 1904 to 1974. Many of these registers are available in public record offices around the country. The DVLA continues to refuse all requests for comparable data (created from April 1974 and thus the oldest now more than thirty years old) to be released from its records and we believe that it is unsatisfactory that these public records are not available for research in the same way. If necessary, information on "live" registrations could be excluded from the disclosure, although "live" registrations remain listed on the earlier registers held by public record offices.

We have no wish for any part of this response to remain confidential.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Hogan', written in a cursive style.

Christopher Hogan  
Hon. Editor.