



Public Record Office  
of Northern Ireland

# **2009 ANNUAL RELEASES**

**1979 files – Highlights List**

*A full list of the files will be available*

## Introduction

The annual release of selected official files continues against a background of greater public access through the Freedom of Information Act balanced against the need to protect personal information. The FOI Act (2000) created a new access to information regime and all records were reviewed in accordance with both that Act and the Data Protection Act.

Records continue to be brought forward for release as they approach 30 years of age. This involves the referral of the files to the Responsible Authority for sensitivity review. This entails a page by page examination to ensure that a record contains nothing sensitive as defined by the FOI Act and DP Act.

This year's annual release covers official files with a terminal date of 1979. Of the 730 departmental files examined, 45 were subject to full closure, with an additional 53 subject to partial closure or redaction (blanking out). Partial closure involves the removal of a limited number of papers from the file that have been deemed as exempt from the right to know under FOI. To facilitate the release of as much information as possible, redaction can be used to blank out sensitive data within individual documents that would otherwise prevent release. All information withheld under this procedure must conform to the exemptions contained in the FOI Act. In the majority of cases, the reason for extended closure was the application of section 40 – the personal information exemption – of the FOI Act. This means that personal information is exempt from the right to know if it would breach the Data Protection principles.

## 1979 Highlighted Files

### Central Secretariat

- CENT/1/6/13**      **1977-79**      **Belfast Areas of Need, Army Briefing** – Includes reference to the meeting between Lord Melchett (NIO Minister) and GOC Commander UK Land Forces, July 1977, at which was discussed the increasing level of violence, and where Melchett disagreed with the Army opinion that ‘violence was endemic to life in NI,’ and where Melchett instead argued ‘that most of NI life went on as almost normal and that in some areas of life people there were less disorderly than in GB ...’
- CENT/1/7/8**      **1978-79**      **Anglo Irish Economic Co-Operation UK / Irish Republic Steering Group** – Illustrative of close cooperation between the two Governments, following meetings in September 1977 between the UK Prime Minister and the Irish Taoiseach, on a review of economic cooperation, and especially focussing on energy, customs and transport. Contains a letter from NIO to the Prime Minister’s Private Secretary, setting out the rationale behind the ongoing Anglo-Irish economic cooperation and an acknowledgement that Margaret Thatcher accepted that it should continue.
- CENT/1/8/8**      **1979**      **Election to the European Assembly** – contains NIO analysis on the strength of the various local candidates and political parties, and the subsequent results, commenting on the success of the DUP and SDLP respectively and the demise of the UUP.
- CENT/1/8/17**      **1979**      **General Election 3 May 1979** – contains copies of the various Northern Ireland political party manifestos and an NIO description and analysis of their contents.
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- CENT/1/8/18**      **1978-1979**      **Reports of Party Conferences, Political briefings, etc**  
– contains briefings on political and constitutional matters, security and the economy, and also reports on various party conferences in 1979 including the UUUP, Alliance, UUP and SDLP.
- CENT/1/8/20**      **1976-1979**      **Devolution** – refers to the financing of a devolved Northern Ireland, whilst trying to maintain a consistency with UK. This contains a very detailed overview of ‘law, order and protective services’ in NI, including forecasted police strength requirements, prison population statistics (including Special Category status), criminal damage and injury breakdowns, etc.
- CENT/1/8/23**      **1979**      **Briefing material for Incoming Secretary of State** – includes a brief potted history covering key events between 1920 and 1978, a briefing on the media commenting on local Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland newspapers, Television and Radio and current media issues, brief on the political parties and personalities, a Who’s Who of politicians, religious leaders, trade unionists, etc., and suggested reading lists for the new ministers covering history, politics and literature.
- CENT/1/8/39**      **1979**      **Republican monument in Crossmaglen** – highlights the difficulty faced by the NIO when the issue of the monument was raised by Harold McCusker MP and the potential options for resolving the situation.
- CENT/1/9/9**      **1979**      **Proposed Security Base at Whiterock** – contains an NIO paper to the Secretary of State setting out the rationale for the proposed new base and the potential socio-economic impact on the area.
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**CENT/1/10/3**      **1977-79**      **Secondary Education: Reorganisation** – A result of the Government consultative document on a comprehensive system of secondary schooling in Northern Ireland. Included: letter from the Chairman of Association of Governing Bodies of Grammar Schools in NI, to Secretary of State Roy Mason, addressing the ‘dangerous situation arising between Lord Melchett and the voluntary grammar schools’ over the sensitive matter of re-organisation. This review in part addressed the maintaining of a balance between voluntary and intermediate / grammar schools.

**Northern Ireland Office**

**NIO/9/2/2/7**      **1976-79**      **1) Working Group on Anti-Terrorism Law:** Details the Government’s attempts to strengthen counter terror legislation, addressing such important issues as: witness protection, the establishment of proof of membership of unlawful organisations, cross border co-operation (and the associated newly created criminal penalties for obstruction of the Garda) and a new focus on the use of surveillance and community co-operation.

**NIO/9/2/3/8**      **1974-79**      **1979 General Election:** confidential detailed overview of the election campaign of the various political parties in each of the twelve Northern Ireland constituencies, including reference to the breakdown of the ‘old hard-line unionist coalition’ (of DUP, UUP and UUUP) and analysis of the results between the DUP and the UUP. Also referred to, the withdrawal of Sinn Fein, and the challenge Gerry Fitt faced in West Belfast from the Republican Clubs.

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<b>NIO/10/2/7</b>	<b>1973-1979</b>	<b>Armagh Prison Security Committee minutes:</b> contains details of the 1973 attempted escape at the prison, the authority's handling of the 1977 protest by twenty one female Special Category status prisoners, and details of general counter terrorist security arrangements.
<b>NIO/10/2/8</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>Prisons management Committee Minutes:</b> illustrates the difficulties in looking after Special Category status prisoners, and refers to the problem of controlling direct threats to prison officers made through the 'Republican News' publication. Also detailed is the refusal of the NIO to take action against Sinn Fein.
<b>NIO/10/11/6</b>	<b>1974-79</b>	<b>Movement of High Risk Prisoners:</b> File details the security arrangements for the transfer of Special Category status prisoners to compounds in HMP Long Kesh (and from August 1978, to the newly opened cellular buildings of HMP Maze) from other prisons, most notably HMP Belfast ('Crumlin Road Gaol').
<b>NIO/10/16/4</b>	<b>1978-79</b>	<b>Discovery of tunnels at all establishments:</b> Details the various security measures in place (and consequently found to be lacking) in order to prevent or otherwise disrupt the digging of tunnels by Special Category status prisoners, primarily at the Compounds at HMP Long Kesh (from August 1978, HMP Maze). One document refers to the mysterious disappearance of a pool table, the remnants of which were later located in the ablutions block, Compound 18 (later assumed to have been used in conjunction with tunnel construction).

NIO/12/123	1978-79	<b>2) Prisoners Protesting Against Refusal of Special Category Status – ECHR – consideration of UK Governments Observations on Admissibility:</b> Refers to the Blanket and Hunger strikes at HMP Armagh and HMP Maze. File includes detailed reports on the main issues and a general overview of the developing situation, with reference to the European Court of Human Rights report.
NIO/12/138	1978-79	<b>Prisons – Meetings – Briefing for Meeting between Secretary of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic in January 1979:</b> Refers to the developing protests at HMP Maze and HMP Armagh, and the appeal to the ECHR by four (HMP Maze) ‘H-Block’ protesters.
NIO/19/2	1976-79	<b>Representation of the People Acts – Elections Expenses – Committee on aid to Political Parties:</b> refers to the heated debate on the Houghton Committee, and the connected issue of a local government scheme for the payment of grants to political parties (most notably in the form of reimbursement of local election expenses) and the anticipated opposition from rate payers and local councils.
NIO/24/1/17	1976-79	<b>Thomas Niedermayer - Criminal injury file:</b> contains the detailed application by the wife of deceased German diplomat Thomas Niedermayer, for compensation relating to his abduction and subsequent murder. He was killed when attempting to escape the IRA.

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- NIO/25/3/17**      **1978-79**      **Security at Maze Prison:** Policy papers and practical issues for the prevention of mass escape or other terrorist interventions. Refers to various shooting incidents and instances of smuggling of explosives into the prison (contains photograph of prison training teams).
- NIO/25/3/18A**      **1973-79**      **Security at Maze Prison:** Details various incidents, such as outbreaks of violence, the discovery of tunnels, weapons and explosives, occurring at the compounds at HMP Long Kesh (and from August 1978, HMP Maze), including rare photographs of an (unspecified) riot in progress.

### Department of Commerce

- COM/58/6/6**      **1975-79**      **Army Briefing Notes:** contains an interesting overview of West and North Belfast (created by Dept. of Commerce), designed for the benefit of new British Army units arriving for operations in Northern Ireland.
- COM/60/A/1/3/157**      **1978-79**      **Interim Executive Legislative Programme:** Refers to the management of Northern Ireland Legislation at Westminster, and acknowledges the danger that primary legislation will become 'more controversial' due a lack of devolved government in Northern Ireland (this had already resulted in existing, temporary legislative arrangements continuing indefinitely).
- COM/63/1/725**      **1979-79**      **Briefing for meetings with Sir Keith Joseph:** with reference to the report, produced by an official group charged with reviewing regional industrial policy, and supplied to Sir Keith Joseph.

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- COM/63/1/733**      **1975-79**      **Inbucon Study of New Industry for West Belfast:**  
Industrial development in West Belfast – Inbucon International Consultancy addresses the problem of getting new jobs into the ailing industry in West Belfast.
- COM/63/1/734**      **1979-79**      **Advertising Campaign 1979/80 USA – policy monitoring – De Lorean Motor Car Company:**  
Illustrates the concern that the Department of Commerce had at the time, that the De Lorean advertising campaign should be ‘mutually satisfactory,’ and that ‘we (NI Government) do not become so closely identified with the De Lorean product before it has proved itself fully that we lose out badly if that product itself does poorly in the market-place ...’
- COM/63/1/785**      **1979-79**      **Whiterock Industrial Estate:** File refers to the problems associated with the construction of a British Army base on the site of Whiterock Industrial Estate, West Belfast. Details are revealed on the NIO and Northern Ireland Government’s discussions regarding securing ownership of the site, and the Government’s attempts to lessen negative publicity (following the opening of the new base), by releasing simultaneous ‘good news’ press releases on Government investment in local West Belfast industry.
- COM/69/82**      **1978-79**      **DOC Departmental and Ministerial Briefs:** includes an overview, for the benefit of incoming Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins and new Departmental Ministers, of the last seven years of Direct Rule in NI, and details of the struggling economy and energy industries.

**Department of the Environment**

**ENV/8/1/20**      **1979**      **Army Housing – Craigavon** – highlights the discussion and disagreements between the Northern Ireland Office and the Ministry of Defence, about using new Housing Executive stock to accommodate a resident battalion in the Craigavon area.

**Department of Health and Social Services**

**HSS/32/1/14/2**      **1978-79**      **Correspondence between Dr GA Lynch and BMA re. Medical Treatment of Prisoners:** Details the sensitive debate surrounding the issue of medical treatment for those prisoners involved in the 'Blanket' protest.

**Department of Manpower Services**

**DMS/5/13**      **1977-79**      **Industrial Relations Intelligence:** contains various Northern Ireland Office papers on the Trade Union movement in Northern Ireland, including briefings and analysis on the composition, leadership, etc., of trade unions.