

In brief

Bid to save birds in adhesive slick

The death toll of birds caught in a mysterious pollution spillage along eight miles of coast has risen. Last night the RSPCA said that 42 of more than 70 birds coated by the leak of industrial adhesive had died or been destroyed. Staff are working desperately to save other birds, including grebes, razorbills, gullinets and sandpipers, in an area of Loughs between St Annes and Fleetwood and further south at Formby. Liverpool coastguards said the adhesive was probably from a barrel lost at sea.

Aussies cool over pommy prince

A poll among Australians shows only lukewarm support for Prince Charles, just three weeks before he visits the country. Just 34 per cent want him as their head of state if he becomes king. And 50 per cent would like Australia to become a republic with an elected president, according to a survey for the *News of the World*.

Equalizer star in heart unit drama

Actor Edward Woodward, star of TV's *The Equalizer* series, spent Christmas in a cardiac care unit as he recovered from flu. Mr Woodward (53), who lives near Calstock, Cornwall, spent seven days in the unit at Plymouth's Derriford hospital. Although the actor has suffered from heart disease previously, the latest illness did not involve any cardiac problems, his agent said.

'Raquel' bares all on paper knickers

Coronation Street barmaid Raquel, in real life actress Sarah Lancashire, has bared all - her worst experience was losing a pair of knickers at school after a swimming lesson. She said "I was 11, we were in the changing rooms and they disappeared. I had to walk back to school, totally humiliated in a pair of paper knickers". And Sarah, married to Gary Hargreaves with two children Thomas (6) and Matthew (5) told *Woman* magazine her greatest extravagance was having two lawnmowers because she could not wait to have the first repaired.

It's a bum rap for quick-fire Mick

Former Dirty Den actor Leslie Grantham has said his latest character, tough guy cop Mick in TV's *99-1*, is a dead loss at making. He revealed to *Woman's Own* magazine: "You know the James Bond type who always gets the women? Well, this character Mick suffers from premature ejaculation instead. It seems that every time he goes to bed with someone he ends up apologising. He'll be popular with women because half the females in this country will probably identify with the problem. "Not that there are lots of love scenes but you do get to see my bum a couple of times."

All-star TV cast in Ayckbourn tour

The voice of TV puppet favourite *Captain Scarlet* takes to the road this month for a tour of 15 towns around Britain in a stage show. And there won't be a mystery in sight. Actor Francis Matthews heads an all-star TV cast for a tour of Alan Ayckbourn's comedy *Aloud Person Singular*, with the Midland Theatre company, until May. He appears with Janet Dibley, Elaine in *Two of Us*, Lizzy Tarkenton, Pamela, *Watching Andrew Hall*, Russell, *Bartenders*, David Hill, Harvey, *Waiting for God* and Georgina Hale, Violet, *Upstairs Downstairs*.

Livewire Bob's water of life

Comic Bob Monkhouse has revealed that the source of his energy in live performances is a quick dram of 18-year-old Macallan malt whisky with water just before he goes on stage. However, the 65-year-old added: "I do enjoy a drink but it is the energy of a finely calculated performance, so I never drink before a TV show."

Novelist working on marriage lines

Ben Elton, whose novel *Slovak* proved a hit BBC series, is planning to marry his Australian mate teacher girlfriend Sophie this year but they have yet to set a date. He said: "Her family are in Australia and mine are in England so we have to work it out. We will be together, I just haven't booked the flights."

Presidential yacht has a magic spell

American magician David Copperfield has brought the former United States presidential yacht *Honey Fitz* for himself and his girlfriend, supermodel Claudia Schiffer. Built in 1950, the seven-figure dreamboat served presidents from Harry Truman to Richard Nixon. It was sold in 1970.

Record office opens Cabinet door to public

By Dr Eamon Phoenix

This week, the public record office of Northern Ireland released to the public under the 30-year rule some previously-confidential Cabinet files mainly relating to 1963. The files include some dating from earlier periods - the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. For the first time, the record office has adopted a

standard 10-year closure period for those files still considered sensitive (ie 30 years plus 10). Few Stormont Cabinet files were embargoed this year though the census records for 1931-61 are in line with policy in Britain, closed indefinitely. Amongst these files closed for 10 years is a Ministry of Agriculture file for 1953-63 entitled *General Enquiries and Customs*.

Returns regarding Transit of Flax from Northern Ireland to Southern Ireland and the Smuggling of Flax. March 1963 saw the aristocratic former Irish Guardsman, Captain Terence O'Neill, succeed the ageing Viscount Brookeborough as prime minister. His Cabinet included several figures destined to dominate unionist politics in the 1960s and 1970s.

Those included: Brian Faulkner (Minister of Commerce from April 1963), William Craig (Minister of Home Affairs), Harry West (Minister of Agriculture), John Andrews (Minister of Finance), Herbert Kirk (Minister of Labour), Major Ian Neill (Minister of Education), and W J Morgan (Minister of Health). 1963 was a quiet year in Northern Ireland politics. The IRA border

campaign had ended desultorily the previous year and, by the end of 1963, all the remaining internees had been released. The major problem facing the new government was unemployment, a factor which prompted some unionist MPs to urge the Tory government to appoint a special Minister for Northern Ireland Affairs. The new administration declared

its faith in the future by announcing the creation of a 'new city', Craigavon. At a political level, the year saw O'Neill edging cautiously towards a more conciliatory policy towards the minority and the south.

the nationalist leader, Eddie McMeekin, spoke of the need for dialogue. Government advisers noted a positive change in Northern public opinion.

Civil rights concerns ignored by Parliament

THE 'Westminster Convention' of precluding discussion of Northern Ireland matters, which obtained between 1922 and 1968, was used to block a Trade Union attempt to raise the question of civil rights in the North in 1963, Cabinet records reveal.

On 11 December 1963, Mr J Lowe, Convenor of the Ford Shop Stewards' Committee at Dagenham wrote to the British Home Secretary, Mr J Parker regarding "the complete lack of democracy that prevails in Northern Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century".

He continued: "We are extremely disturbed to find that the people of Northern Ireland do not even enjoy the democratic rights prevailing in the rest of Britain."

He urged the Westminster Parliament to exercise its absolute authority under the 1920 Act to ensure the release of political prisoners, the extension of the franchise in local elections on the British model and the "prevention of discrimination on a religious basis".

The Home Secretary asked his officials to "look into these points". Mr Merony pie replied on 27 December 1963: "The responsibility for all these matters was transferred to the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland by the Government of Ireland Act 1920."

While the Act reserved supreme authority to the Westminster Parliament, "this saving does not prevent the UK Government to interfere in matters which are within the responsibility of the Northern Ireland government and it would not be right for me to comment on such matters."

Stormont said No to address by president

A REQUEST for Mr Eamon de Valera to visit south down during the Stormont general election in 1937 was refused by the government of Lord Craigavon, according to confidential cabinet papers released this week in the north.

On November 21, 1933, Mr J P Walsh, of the Free State government telegraphed Stormont with a request from Flanna Fail Defence Minister Frank Aiken, who wanted to attend the funeral of his brother-in-law at Poyntzpass, Co Armagh.

The official asked whether the Northern Ireland government would accommodate the minister or object to his crossing the border. "We found also asked whether, in case Mr de Valera desired to attend and address one or two political meetings in south down, there would be any objection on the part of the government."

At the time of consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Stormont informed Dublin there would be no objection to Mr Aiken's attendance at the funeral provided he called at the RUC district inspector's office in Newry to inform the police of the exact time of his arrival.

However, where the president was concerned, the Dublin authorities were informed "that the government will not assent to Mr de Valera visiting Northern Ireland."

Cosgrave plea to release prisoners from prison in Belfast

NEW light on Mr de Valera's arrest for entering Northern Ireland in breach of an exclusion order in 1929 is shed by Stormont cabinet papers now available in Belfast.

The *Flaxa* Fall leader was due to open a Gaelic League bazaar in St Mary's Hall, Belfast, when he was arrested, charged and sentenced to one month's imprisonment in Crumlin Road Jail.

In a secret memo to the Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs, Sir Dawson Bates on 12 February 1929, County Inspector E Gillin, of the RUC headquarters staff, reported: "In all RC circles the action of the government in arresting Mr de Valera is severely criticised, the moderate section basing their objections on the grounds that he could do no harm to the peaceful state of the country and that it only opened old sores and strengthened his hands in the Free State where his prestige was declining."

"While the extreme section are denouncing the government vehemently, they are delighted with the result as they consider the propaganda derived from the proceedings well worth the penalty. "It is stated that similar views are expressed by persons all over the six counties and commercial travellers returning from the Free State that there is a decided change in the people owing to the Valera's arrest."

The county inspector referred to rumours of a renewed boycott of the possible kidnapping of the Unionist chief whip, Captain Dixon MP. Southern discontent was reflected in a flood of letters of protest from public bodies to the Stormont prime minister, The Free State Prime Minister, Mr W T Cosgrave, was sufficiently concerned at the shift in southern opinion to send a special emissary, Mr Dawson Bates (the secretary to the executive council) to Belfast on 11 February with a letter on the Flaxa Fall leader's arrest. He told Lord Craigavon:

"My colleagues and I quite appreciate the position in regard to Mr de Valera's arrest and sentence. When, therefore, I make an appeal to you to release Mr de Valera I am asking you purely as an act of grace to take this course which in my opinion is most likely to be conducive to the maintenance and improvement of the good relations which happily exist between our people."

Whether Mr de Valera's infringement of the order was inadvertent or deliberate, the Free State prime minister felt strongly that his continued incarceration "will only serve to promote the objects which he had in view."

Craigavon was not unsympathetic. A note on the file records: "The prime minister, having been approached by Mr Cosgrave to release Mr de Valera purely as an act of grace, the minister of home affairs (Sir Dawson Bates) has expressed his willingness to advise the governor to exercise the prerogative of mercy and remit the remainder of the sentence provided Mr de Valera undertakes not to re-enter Northern Ireland so long as the exclusion order remains in force."

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● Captain Terence O'Neill, who succeeded Viscount Brookeborough as prime minister in the Stormont Cabinet in March 1963

Early contacts focus on issue of prisoners

NEW evidence of early contacts between the Free State government of William T Cosgrave and the northern administration of Sir James Craig emerge in Cabinet files now available in Belfast.

On July 21 1923, Cosgrave wrote to Sir James Craig referring to their recent meeting at which Craig had promised to "consider favourably" the cases of a number of Irish prisoners, incarcerated for political activities in 1922.

They included Captain T Heuston, sentenced to 10 years penal servitude and claimed by Cosgrave as a member of the Free State defence forces.

He added: "I sincerely hope that you may see your way to have these men released and I can assure you that it would be an act of grace that they would be most appreciated by my colleagues."

In a guarded reply on July 21, Sir James undertook to consider the cases. At the same time, he asked his Minister of Home Affairs, Sir Dawson Bates to consult his advisers on the matter, observing: "It is at the back of my mind that Heuston was too severely dealt with, and that he might indicate a date on which he might be recommended for release."

In a further reply to Cosgrave on July 30 1923, however, Craig pointed to the "insupportable difficulties which I experience in complying with your request."

The prisoners in question, he stated, "were found guilty of crimes under the ordinary law. Although we cannot differentiate the cases of these men from those of other

prisoners, I can promise you that, in accordance with our normal practice, we will carefully consider whether there are any factors which would justify us in mitigating the sentences that have been imposed. At the present time this would be premature."

The northern prime minister stressed his Cabinet's view that "any tampering with the principle of equality before the law" would be "grossly regretted" and that he would not be "able to meet Mr Cosgrave's wishes in the matter."

The issue was revived by Cosgrave in March 1925 at a height of the boundary commission controversy. On March 21 he wrote to Lord Grey urging him to use his influence with Lord Carson in the matter.

Mr Cosgrave stated: "It is claimed that these are political prisoners but the northern government has held the opposite. They are not acting fairly towards us in this matter. The action that they (the prisoners) took, and which has cost them so dearly, was not taken without authority. I understand they acted under the orders of some military commander. We have taken risks in releasing prisoners down here. I believe that the release of these prisoners would contribute to normality in both areas. One of Col-lins's last wishes was that I should not rest until these men were released."

Lord Grey duly forwarded the letter to Carson (dear Ned), urging an amnesty for the prisoners. "Personally," he wrote, "I know nothing of the circumstances. I do know, however, that the continued incarceration of these men is the last and only card left to the republican party to play with in the Free State and I am convinced that an amnesty for them would not only go far to help matters, but would also materially contribute to a better feeling in the north."

He was convinced from speeches by Archbishop O'Donnell and Ernest Blythe that there had never been a more friendly disposition towards the north on the part of the south.

Carson duly sent the correspondence on to Craig while Cosgrave wrote to the northern prime minister concerning the case of Eddie McMeekin MP.

On 5 July 1922, the then Prime Minister, Lord Brookeborough, accompanied by the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Brian Faulkner, met a nationalist delegation led by Mr Eddie McMeekin MP.

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