



In the sharp cold of early morning, two men stand guard over a million Christmas trees. The Yattendon estate, near Reading, will be protected round the clock against tree thieves until Christmas Eve.

Payout for Hull riot prisoner

by DAVID LEIGH

Exclusive

THE Home Office prisons department has handed over £1,200 to a prisoner serving 18 years—£800 for his lawyers' bills and £400 for his gold pen, books and records which disappeared in the aftermath of the 1976 Hull prison riot.

The sudden offer to pay Mr Colin Simpson's full claim, which the Home Office had been refusing to accept for more than four years, came just as his lawyers were walking into a courtroom to demand enforcement of a 'discovery' order under which the Home Office would have had to release its internal files on the riot.

Ms Harman herself has been at the centre of another legal battle over 'discovered' documents. The House of Lords is expected to give judgment next month on her appeal against a successful prosecution by the Home Office prison department for contempt of court, after she released to me 'discovered' documents which had been read out in open court, detailing Home Office policy errors over a prison sentence for Mr Ian Porter, the prisons department press officer, refused on Friday to say why the claim had suddenly been paid.

Mr Simpson, a top-security 'Category A' prisoner, was one of the rioters who broke on to the roof at Hull in 1976, and did considerable damage. As well as being fined £1,000, he was given nine months loss of privileges and more than a year extra in prison through loss of remission for armed robbery charges.

Briefly...

Two held over boy

A 30-year-old man and a 15-year-old boy will appear before Leicester magistrates tomorrow after being charged today with the murder of 13-year-old John Haddon, of Sutton Coldfield, whose naked body was found last weekend in a Leicestershire ditch.

North Sea bomb scare

Oil companies carried out intensive security checks of the North Sea installations yesterday after a warning that bombs had been planted in Norwegian oil and gas fields. It was not known if any bombs were found, but in another incident, more than 400 construction workers were taken by helicopter from the North Sea rig in Shell's Fulmar oilfield after an H.A. crack was discovered in a rig leg.

Oxford—at 10

St Hugh's College, Oxford, has awarded a scholarship to Ruth Lawrence, aged 10 from Huddersfield, who beat 530 candidates to come top in a mathematics entrance examination.

Cuba mystery

American Secretary of State Alexander Haig had a secret meeting with Cuban Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez in Mexico City 13 days ago, according to the Madrid paper 'El Pais'. The State Department would not comment on the report, but the Cuban Government has confirmed that Rodriguez was in Mexico City on the day in question, but denies that he met Haig. (Haig offer, page 7.)

Coventry peace

The four-week strike by 4,000 council workers in Coventry, which has closed the city schools and colleges and forced 60,000 pupils and students to stay at home, ended yesterday after cleaners and caretakers agreed to go to arbitration.

Ford strike

Transmission workers at Ford's Halewood factory voted yesterday to strike from 5 January after rejecting the firm's pay offer of 7.2 per cent. (Ford bosses ready, page 15).

Davis holds title

Steve Davis thrashed Terry Griffiths 16-3 to retain his Coral UK professional snooker crown at the Guild Hall, Preston yesterday.

Mini-Tog

Tatchell...? I thought it was Tatchell...

The weather

Cloudy, with catbreaks of rain. Brighter, showery weather over Northern Ireland and Scotland will spread south-east later. Outlook: Bright intervals and wintry showers. Sleet or snow in places. (Details, page 2.)

IRA informer gets immunity

from PATRICK BISHOP in Belfast

THE IRA 'supergrass' whose information has led to a wave of Republican arrests in Northern Ireland has been offered immunity from prosecution, according to legal sources, to an extent which the authorities have so far not disclosed. But official sources refused to confirm this yesterday.

The Northern Ireland security forces believe that the disclosures of Christopher Black, aged 29, mark a painful setback for the Provisionals. Since he turned informant after his arrest late last month 20 people have appeared in Belfast courts on charges ranging from murder to membership of the IRA.

An IRA training camp has been discovered in Donegal, and a member of the M60 machine-gun gang who escaped a 10-year term in prison in June has been recaptured. More arrests are expected.

Despite those successes disquiet has been expressed about any deal which may have been struck between Black and the security forces.

There are also doubts about the efficiency of the system, where terrorists who conform to prison regulations are freed on licence after serving only half their time, with the threat of serving the rest if they get into trouble.

Black was released from the Maze, near Belfast, last December after serving five years of his 10-year term imposed for armed robbery and membership of the IRA.

The news that Black had turned 'tout' came as a surprise in the Republican housing estates of Ardoyne and Old Park, Belfast, where he was well known as a quiet but committed IRA man.

He was arrested on the night of Saturday, 21 November after reports that the IRA were mounting road-blocks in the Ardoyne. When Black's solicitor turned up to see him on the Monday, however, he was told he was not wanted.

The next day the security forces began a series of raids on Republican areas in the north and west of the city. That evening the police turned up at Black's council home with a removal van and took away his wife, mother-in-law and four children. They are now believed to be in hiding somewhere in the north of England.

Black's information also led to the discovery of the Donegal coast of an IRA island training camp. The raid turned up 11 Armalite rifles, a shotgun and 4,000 rounds of ammunition.

Black is also thought to have played a part in the capture of Michael McKee, who escaped with seven others from Crumlin Road jail last June, shortly before being sentenced to 20 years in jail for possessing an M60 machine-gun.

Immunity deals between terrorists and police have been done before on several occasions, but they still cause disquiet.

Official Unionist MP Harold McCusker told The Observer: 'My immediate reaction is that immunity is a terrible price to pay. On the other hand, the security forces are caught between the vice of wanting to extinguish terrorism and the cellular system of the IRA.'

One, Mr Paschal O'Hare, who is defending two men on charges of conspiracy to murder and membership of the IRA, says he will be pressing for Black to appear in the magistrate's court so that he can be cross-examined on his depositions before the case goes to a high court.

Sources close to the Provisionals have been playing down the consequences of Black's defection.

However, the range of his disclosures suggests that the IRA's much vaunted cell system, which supposedly restricts each member's knowledge of operations to an immediate circle of two or three, may not be nearly as impregnable as they would have people believe.

Black will have to appear in court to give evidence against those he has named. After that he and his family face a life of nervous exile.



Sakharov daughter-in-law seized

by our Foreign Staff

LIZA ALEXEYEVA (above), the woman for whom Dr Andrei Sakharov is on hunger strike, was detained briefly yesterday by KGB security police and told not to try to see him, friends said.

Miss Alexeyeva, 26, was seized by two men in plain clothes as she entered Moscow's Yaroslavsky station travel to the city, 250 miles east of the capital, where Dr Sakharov and his wife are in hospital. She made her way home by bus and hitchhiking.

Dr Sakharov, 60, and his wife, Yelena Bonner, 58, were taken to hospital on Friday, apparently against their will, on the thirteenth day of their fast. The Sakharovs' protest is aimed at getting an exit visa for Miss Alexeyeva to join her husband, the son of Mrs Sakharov by a former marriage, who lives in the United States.

A similar incident occurred in May 1980, when Miss Alexeyeva was forcibly prevented from boarding a train at the same station. She had made numerous trips to Gorky before that, carrying provisions to Dr Sakharov.

She said she was warned at the station to visit Sakharov. She continued to live at the Sakharov family apartment in Moscow.

Miss Alexeyeva, whom the Sakharovs regard as their daughter-in-law, was recently forbidden to travel to Gorky.

But there have been reports that the Soviet Academy of Sciences had appealed to her since then to intercede with Dr Sakharov and bring the hunger strike to an end, which suggested the authorities might be willing to let her go.

S Africa tours: one off, one on

by PETER DEELEY

THE Welsh Rugby Union will announce tomorrow that it has called off its proposed South African tour. But another apartheid sports row seems imminent after the arrival in Johannesburg yesterday of a combined Oxford-Cambridge cricket side.

The Welsh authorities were deeply divided on whether to bow to considerable political pressure against the tour, fears of repercussions at home and the danger of the next year's Commonwealth Games were two factors, which finally influenced them. The tour was due to have taken place in the summer.

No sooner were the anti-apartheid movements celebrating the victory, however, than they learned that the combined varieties side had slipped secretly into South Africa to play a series of matches.

Mr Sam Ramsamy, chairman of the South African Non Racial Olympic Committee, said: 'This is a real blow. If we had known about the tour beforehand we could have stopped it, because of our strength in the universities.'

These young men above all should be aware of the truth about South Africa. They think they are above the moral code, are above the moral code, are above the moral code.

Today in colour

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TURKEY FOR CHRISTMAS

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Scargill's profile

HOWE'S MINI-BUDGET

Adam Raphael and William Keegan

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Gardening

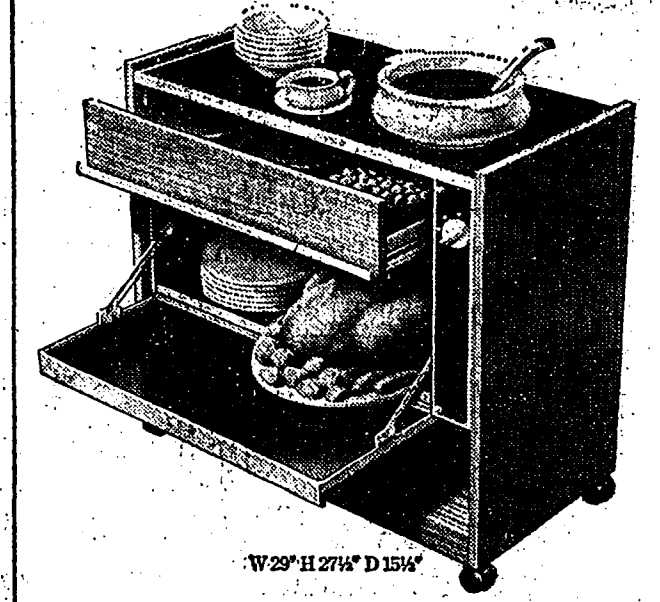
TELEVISION'S WAX MUSEUM

Peter Conrad

UNFUSSY FASHION

33

It looks good enough to sit at your dining room table.



Unlike heated trolleys made of inexpensive materials, the new Salton Entertainer has an impressive fine-grain real wood veneer.

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The food you've cooked, therefore, will not continue to cook. Neither will it congeal and spoil.

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