

NOTE FOR THE FILE

PEERESSES

The Lord Chancellor saw Lady Wootton, Lady Hylton-Foster and Lady Swanborough at 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday 4th February.

The deputation stated that they wished to be distinguished from the wives of peers and that they would like in future to be called “women peers” and not “peeresses” (as was the present position on the lavatory doors). They instanced a number of cases (including page 10 of the General Information for Peers) where women peers were incorrectly described as peeresses.

The Lord Chancellor saw that this was not an easy matter as there were four classes: wives of peers, hereditary peerages of higher rank which could devolve on women, Scottish peerages which could devolve on women (on which there was a dispute as to whether or not the holder was a baron (or baroness)) and life peers. He pointed out that in the Royal Warrant of 22nd July 1958 the phrase “life peeress” was used twice.

The deputation said that they were aware of the Royal Warrant but thought that it could be modified and, although they conceded that “life peeress” did distinguish them from wives of peers, they would prefer to be called life peers rather than life peeresses as the distinction of sex should only be used where necessary. The general public did not understand the difference between a peeress and a life peeress.

The Lord Chancellor said that he would mention the point to the Lord Privy Seal and suggest that he might tell the Press at one of his Press Conferences ...