



# THE PRIME MINISTER

## **DUELLING PRIME MINISTERS**

Four Prime Ministers, including the Duke of Wellington, are known to have taken part in duels to settle grievances. George Canning was wounded in the thigh by a Cabinet rival in a duel in 1809 which led to them both resigning their posts.

## **CHEQUERS**

The PM has an official country residence called Chequers in Buckinghamshire. Chequers is used for official hospitality and as a weekend retreat.

## **The Prime Minister's role**

The Prime Minister (PM) is head of the Government of the United Kingdom. The official title is 'First Lord of the Treasury'. The PM has overall responsibility for the government's policies and, as head of the Government, is also responsible for the civil service and government agencies.

The PM selects members of the Cabinet, the main decision-making body in government. Cabinet members are usually the Secretaries of State of government departments, plus other invited Ministers and Peers. The Cabinet meets each Tuesday.

The current Prime Minister is the Rt Hon David Cameron MP.

## **The Prime Minister and Parliament**

In the House of Commons the PM's duties are to make formal statements, answer questions from MPs and take part in debates. Prime Minister's Questions lasts 30 minutes and takes place every Wednesday at noon when the House is sitting. The PM sits on the Government frontbench on the Speaker's right, near the despatch box in the House of Commons.

Since 2002, the PM has appeared before the Liaison Committee twice a year to answer questions on international and domestic affairs. The Liaison Committee is made up of the Chairs of the House of Commons Select Committees. These sessions usually last up to two and a half hours.

The PM does not receive prior notice of the questions, although they are usually based on a limited number of themes.

The Prime Minister is a sitting MP with a constituency role just like any other MP.

## History

The first PM is generally agreed to have been Sir Robert Walpole who held the office from 1720 to 1742. He held the title First Lord of the Treasury and was also Chancellor of the Exchequer. The term 'Prime Minister' was not an official title at that time and was only formally recognised in 1905.

David Cameron is the 53rd Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher was the first female PM, holding the office from 1979 to 1990. Walpole holds the record for the longest period of unbroken service in office, lasting 20 years and 314 days. The youngest PM was William Pitt the Younger who was 24 when he first took office in 1783. The oldest PM was William Ewart Gladstone who was 82 when appointed to his final period in office in 1892.

Other notable PMs include Spencer Perceval, the only British PM to be assassinated. In May 1812, while in the House of Commons lobby Perceval was shot by John Bellingham, a debt-ridden merchant who blamed the government

for his predicament and wanted revenge. Bellingham was later tried and hanged for Perceval's murder.

## Number 10

The Prime Minister's residence in London has been Number 10 Downing Street since 1730 when it was presented by King George II as a gift to Sir Robert Walpole. Walpole refused the property as a personal gift and requested that it be made available to First Lords of the Treasury in their official capacity. Since then most PMs have used it as their official residence, although its state of repair meant that some early PMs preferred to live in their own private homes.

Behind the famous black door, Number 10 is bigger than it looks. Over the years, adjoining buildings have been incorporated and extensive renovations have taken place. The PM has use of a flat in Number 10 and other rooms are used for official meetings and receptions. Margaret Thatcher described it as 'living above the shop'. The current PM and his family live in the larger flat above 11 Downing Street.

The facade of Number 10 was cleaned in the 1950s, revealing it to be built of yellow brick, its black appearance was due to 200 years of London pollution. The cleaned bricks were painted black to retain their familiar appearance.

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