



Ministerial residences

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Author: Keith Parry and Andrew Dommett

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The available ministerial residences are assigned to ministers at the discretion of the Prime Minister. They include the living accommodation at numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street (currently allocated to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister respectively); the Foreign Secretary's residence in Carlton Gardens; and flats in Admiralty House. Accommodation at Hillsborough Castle and Stormont may be used by Northern Ireland Office ministers when on duty there.

Three stately homes are available for ministerial use in accordance with the wishes of their former owners. They are not owned by the Government but are administered by trustees. Chequers in Buckinghamshire has been used by successive Prime Ministers. Chevening in Kent is traditionally allocated to Foreign Secretaries although its use is now divided between the present Foreign Secretary and the Deputy Prime Minister. Dorneywood in Buckinghamshire is by convention placed at the disposal of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The *Ministerial code* contains provisions relating to official residences. This note summarises the existing position and sketches out the history of each residence.

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Contents

1	Ministerial residences	3
2	Ministerial code	3
3	Official hospitality	4
4	Notes on individual residences	4
4.1	Chequers, Chevening and Dorneywood	4
	Chequers	4
	Chevening	5
	Dorneywood	6
4.2	Other residences	7
	Admiralty House	7
	1 Carlton Gardens	7
	Downing Street	8
	Hillsborough Castle	8

1 Ministerial residences

A parliamentary answer in March 2008 gave a list of the available residences as follows:

Mr. Watson: Official residences are assigned to Ministers by the Prime Minister either on grounds of security or in order to allow them to perform better their official duties. Rules on the use of official residences are set out in the “Ministerial Code”. Official residences available to Ministers are:

The flats above Numbers **10 and 11 Downing street**;

Flats in **Admiralty House**;

1 Carlton Gardens;

Hillsborough Castle and **Stormont** are available for Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office while on duty in Northern Ireland.

In addition, **Chequers**, **Dorneywood** and **Chevening**, none of which is owned by the Government are also used by Ministers. The **Government House in Pimlico** is no longer required and is in the process of being sold.¹

David Cameron provided the following information on the allocation of residences to ministers in a parliamentary answer of July 2010:

The Prime Minister: I currently have the use of the flat above No. 10 Downing street but will be moving in to the residence above No. 11 Downing street when it has been refurbished. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne) will have use of the flat above No. 10 Downing Street from the summer. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary (Mr Hague) has been allocated the use of the residence at No. 1 Carlton Gardens. The flats at Admiralty House are currently unoccupied.²

The Prime Minister, in accordance with tradition, uses Chequers. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has the use of Dorneywood.³ Chevening is occupied by both the Foreign Secretary and the Deputy Prime Minister (Nick Clegg) who use it “...in an official and private capacity, each being the Nominated Person in turn for the duration of their visits”.⁴

2 Ministerial code

The latest edition of the Ministerial code, dated May 2010, gives the following guidance to ministers:

Where a Minister is allocated an official residence, they must ensure that all personal tax liabilities, including council tax, are properly discharged, and that they personally pay such liabilities. Ministers who occupy an official residence will not be able to claim Accommodation Expenses from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.⁵

The question of whether an official residence is deemed to be the main residence of a minister is important in determining who pays the council tax on it. This was explained by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in a parliamentary answer in June 2000.

¹ HC Deb 3 March 2008 c2208W

² HC Deb 12 July 2010 c463W

³ HC Deb 21 July 2010 c384W

⁴ Chevening House, [Chevening House - current use](#), June 2010

⁵ Cabinet Office, [Ministerial code](#), May 2010, para 7.10

All these properties [i.e. the official residences in London] are in council tax banding H. The level and responsibility for payment of council tax is determined on whether the property is the Minister's main or secondary residence. If a main residence, the responsibility for payment of the tax falls to the Minister. If the property is a secondary residence, responsibility for payment falls to the responsible Department. Two Ministers occupying flats in Admiralty House met their own council tax payments, as did I. Departments met the other payments, which were £350 for each property in 1999-2000.⁶

Council tax in respect of Chequers, Dorneywood and Chevening is a matter for the trustees of each residence.

3 Official hospitality

A parliamentary question on this subject in July 2010 was answered as follows:

Pete Wishart: To ask the Prime Minister which guests have been invited to (a) Chequers, (b) Chevening House and (c) Dorneywood in each of the last 12 months. [8429]

The Prime Minister: A list of guests who have received official hospitality at Chequers is published on an annual basis and is available in the Library of the House. Information for the financial year 2009-10 will be published in the usual way. The use of Chevening is a matter for the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the trustees who manage the estate. The use of Dorneywood is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the trustees who manage the estate.⁷

The *Ministerial code* states the following under the heading "Ministers' constituency and party interests":

Government property should not generally be used for constituency work or party activities. A particular exception is recognised in the case of official residences. Where Ministers host Party or personal events in these residences it should be at their own or Party expense with no cost falling to the public purse.⁸

4 Notes on individual residences

4.1 Chequers, Chevening and Dorneywood

Chequers

Chequers in Buckinghamshire dates from the 16th-century. The house and its 1000-acre estate was bequeathed to the nation in 1917 by Sir Arthur Lee (later Lord Lee of Fareham), who was then MP for Fareham and Director-General of Food Production. It was to be the official country residence of the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George becoming its first prime ministerial occupant in 1921. The objects of the gift were set out in a schedule to the *Chequers Estate Act 1917*:-

It is not possible to foresee or foretell from what classes or conditions of life the future wielders of power in this country will be drawn. Some may be as in the past men of wealth and famous descent; some may belong to the world of trade and business; others may spring from the ranks of the manual toilers. To none of these in the midst of their strenuous and responsible labours could the spirit and anodyne of Chequers do

⁶ HC Deb 5 June 2000, c 49-50W

⁷ HC Deb 19 July 2010 c50W

⁸ Cabinet Office, *Ministerial code*, May 2010, para 6.2

anything but good. In the city-bred man especially, the periodic contact with the most typical rural life would create and preserve a just sense of proportion between the claims of town and country. To the revolutionary statesman the antiquity and calm tenacity of Chequers and its annals might suggest some saving virtues in the continuity of English history and exercise a check upon too hasty upheavals, whilst even the most reactionary could scarcely be insensible to the spirit of human freedom which permeated the countryside of Hampden Burke and Milton.

Apart from these more subtle influences, the better the health of our rulers the more sanely will they rule and the inducement to spend two days a week in the high and pure air of the Chiltern hills and woods will, it is hoped, benefit the nation as well as its chosen leaders. The main features of this scheme are therefore designed not merely to make Chequers available as the official country residence of the Prime Minister of the day, but to tempt him to visit it regularly and to make it possible for him to live there, even though his income should be limited to his salary.

The 1917 Act provided for a board of ex-officio trustees to administer the estate and trust fund. The board became somewhat unwieldy as its numbers increased to a total of fourteen by 1958. The *Chequers Estate Act 1958* reduced the board to a total of six during the lifetime of Lady Lee (she died in 1967), and five after her death – the Lord Privy Seal, the Prime Minister's nominee, a nominee of the Ministry of Works, the Chairman of the National Trust and the Public Trustee.

As stated above, there is a trust fund but the trustees also receive an annual grant-in-aid from the Government which helps to pay for the maintenance of the house and estate and covers civilian staff costs.

Chevening

Chevening, near Sevenoaks in Kent, is a 115-room neo-classical house built in the early 17th-century (reputedly to designs by Inigo Jones) and set in some 3,500 acres of land. It was left to the nation in 1967 by the seventh Earl of Stanhope on condition that it was occupied by either the Prime Minister of the day, a Cabinet Minister or a descendant of King George VI. The Prime Minister has the power to nominate the occupant. The Prince of Wales initially accepted such a nomination in 1974 but subsequently declined. The house then became effectively the country residence of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington having been the first holder of that office to occupy the house.

The *Chevening Estate Act 1959* and *Chevening Estate Act 1987* gave statutory effect to the vesting deed and trust instrument and established a board of trustees responsible for the administering the trust fund and maintaining the house. The board consists of the Lord Privy Seal, two persons appointed by the Prime Minister (at least one of who must be experienced in estate management and forestry), a person appointed by the Secretary of State, the Director of the Victoria & Albert Museum and 'such other persons as are from time to time being appointed by the members holding office.'

The house at Chevening is not generally open to the public but the garden is opened three times a year for charitable events.⁹ A list of recent occupants of Chevening is given on the Chevening House website:

The Rt Hon Anthony Barber 1973

The Rt Hon The Lord Hailsham 1973-74

⁹ Chevening House, [Chevening House – current use](#), June 2010

HRH The Prince of Wales 1974-80
The Rt Hon The Lord Carrington 1981-82
The Rt Hon Francis Pym 1982-83
The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe 1983-89
The Rt Hon John Major 1989
The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd 1989-95
The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind 1995-97
The Rt Hon Robin Cook 1997-2001
The Rt Hon Jack Straw 2001-06
The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett 2006-07
The Rt Hon David Miliband 2007-10
The Rt Hon William Hague and The Rt Hon Nick Clegg 2010-¹⁰

Dorneywood

Dorneywood, a 21-room house in Buckinghamshire was donated to the nation (through the National Trust) in the early 1940s by Lord Courtauld-Thomson. The house is set in 215 acres and was largely rebuilt after a fire in 1910. James Lees-Milne visited the house on behalf of the National Trust in May 1942. He wrote:-

The house is not up to our standard, although a fairly pleasant red brick building, now swathed in, rather dribbling with, great bunches of wonderful wisteria. The central part is possibly of Queen Anne's time. Lorimer's additions are indifferent in C[ourtauld]-T[homson]'s opinion which I felt free to corroborate. The outbuildings, motor-house, etc have been faked about in half-timbering to look olde-worlde. The green fields close to Burnham Beeches, in which the house stands, should be preserved.¹¹

The gift was made with the object of providing an official furnished residence "...for the use of the Prime Minister of the day or for such other Minister of the Crown or such other specified persons as the Prime Minister might nominate." By tradition, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is given the use of Dorneywood and, indeed, it was allocated to Gordon Brown in 1997. However, he reportedly had little use for it and it became the country residence of the then Deputy Prime Minister (John Prescott) from about 1999 until May 2006. Alistair Cooke, former Deputy Director of the Conservative Research Department, wrote the following in a letter to *The Times* in June 2006:

Sir, the intense interest in the fate of the "key to Dorneywood" (comment, June 5) would have amazed Churchill, who in 1954 became the first person to dispense this piece of prime ministerial patronage.

Then, no one seemed to want it. Anthony Eden lived there briefly, but spent most of his weekends on the telephone to Chequers bickering with Churchill over foreign policy. Harold Macmillan, the next in line, turned it down. Eventually, however, it won the heart

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ James Lees-Milne. *Ancestral Voices*. Chatto & Windus. 1975, p 59

of Willie Whitelaw, even though Alan Clark, visiting him in 1986, ticked him off rudely for liking “this dreary redbrick house in flat country.”

Clark did, however, concede that “the furniture is good” - quite a tribute from that expert.¹²

Alistair Darling, the last Labour Chancellor, had the use of Dorneywood as an official residence as does the current Chancellor, George Osborne. As with Chevening, expenditure is borne by a trust and so does not come within the jurisdiction of departmental budgets. When ministers use the house for official government business, the expenses are paid by the department. There is no right of public access to the house but the garden is opened to the public under the National Gardens Scheme at various times of year.¹³

A parliamentary answer from November 2009 gave information on how the trustees of Dorneywood are appointed:

One trustee is nominated by the Prime Minister, being a person holding Cabinet or ministerial rank. One trustee is appointed by the Council of the National Trust. One trustee is appointed by a resolution of the trustees on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Fourthly an additional trustee may be appointed by the other trustees.

The three non-ministerial trustees are appointed for a period of five years, renewable for a further period of five years, subject to the agreement of all the trustees.¹⁴

4.2 Other residences

Admiralty House

Admiralty House is a Grade I listed building, constructed in the late 18th-century as a residence for holders of the post of First Lord of the Admiralty, the civilian head of the Royal Navy. It contains state rooms as well as residential accommodation. Winston Churchill lived there while he held the post from 1911 to 1915 and 1939 to 1940. Denis Healey found living arrangements “highly inconvenient” when he and his family moved there after his appointment as Defence Secretary in 1964.¹⁵ The three ministerial flats have been assigned to various ministers in recent years. These have included Lord Malloch-Brown, Lord Falconer of Thoroton, Geoff Hoon, Margaret Beckett and John Prescott.

1 Carlton Gardens

Carlton House Terrace and its extension, Carlton Gardens, were built during the period 1827-1833 to designs by John Nash. Prince Louis Napoleon (later Napoleon III) lived in exile at No. 1 in 1839-40. Various foreign secretaries, including Lords Palmerston and Curzon, chose to live in the houses of Carlton Gardens, but No. 1 became the official London residence of foreign secretaries from 1945 when it was acquired on lease from the Crown Estates for Ernest Bevin¹⁶ The property is a grade I listed building comprising state rooms, which are used for meetings, receptions and entertainment, and a self-contained two-floor residential apartment.

Margaret Beckett was resident until October 2007. Press reports indicated that her successor, David Miliband, preferred to use his own London home and that 1 Carlton

¹² Alistair Cook, “Lower house” (letter). *The Times*. 7 June 2006 p 16

¹³ National Trust, [Dorneywood Garden](#)

¹⁴ HC Deb 11 November 2009 cc411-2W

¹⁵ Denis Healey, *The Time of my Life*, Michael Joseph, 1989, pp 253-4

¹⁶ HC Deb 31 January 1997 c425-6W

Gardens was therefore being used solely for official functions.¹⁷ The residence has been allocated to the present Foreign Secretary, William Hague, who has borne the cost of redecoration and refurbishment of the residential accommodation. Essential repairs and maintenance of the building are funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.¹⁸

Downing Street

Ten Downing Street is traditionally the home of the Prime Minister. It was offered by George II as a personal gift to Sir Robert Walpole, who was First Lord of the Treasury and effectively, though not officially, Prime Minister. Walpole declined the gift but accepted the house as a residence for holders of the office of First Lord. He himself took up residence in 1735. The office of First Lord of the Treasury was not then synonymous with that of Prime Minister and the house was as frequently occupied by Chancellors of the Exchequer as by Prime Ministers during the next 100 years. Since A.J. Balfour (PM 1902-05), all Prime Ministers have lived at No. 10 and all have been First Lords.

Eleven Downing Street has been the official residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1828. Tony Blair, lived with his family in the flat above 11 Downing Street when Prime Minister because it was larger than the 10 Downing Street flat. The latter was occupied by Gordon Brown as Chancellor. When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, he moved into the flat above number 11 and Alistair Darling took over the flat above number 10.¹⁹ Similarly, David Cameron indicated early in his premiership that he would be moving to the flat above No. 11 while the Chancellor, George Osborne, would have the use of the flat above No. 10.²⁰

Hillsborough Castle

Hillsborough Castle is a late eighteenth-century mansion house built by the first Marquis of Downshire. The sixth Marquis sold the estate to the British Government in 1922 after which it became the official residence of the Governor of Northern Ireland. Since 1972, the castle's primary role has been as a residence for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, although it is also used by other Northern Ireland ministers when on duty in the province and is the primary royal residence there. A number of official and charitable functions are held at Hillsborough and it is open to the public for a limited time each year.

¹⁷ See, for example, "Miliband to give up London mansion in the name of efficiency", *Financial Times*, 14 April 2008, p2. Also HL Deb 13 May 2009 c206WA

¹⁸ HC Deb 22 July 2010 c543W

¹⁹ 10 Downing Street, *Morning press briefing from 18 July 2007*, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page12547.asp>

²⁰ HC Deb 12 July 2010 c463W