

Downing Street Cats (2005+)

and other British Government felines

(page checked January 2026)

To go directly to the text for a particular cat, use the following links (to PnF website):

[Pre-1960s](#) [Nemo](#) [Wilberforce](#) [Humphrey](#) [Sybil](#) [Larry](#) [Freya](#)

There's a history of resident cats in the British 'corridors of power' – including the prime minister's residence, the War Office, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office and the Treasury – dating as far back as the time of Henry VIII, when Cardinal Wolsey was his Chancellor of the Exchequer. Arthur Balfour, prime minister from 1902 to 1905, had a cat called **Topsy**, while in 1907 *Tatler* magazine published a photo of 'Cats in Office' at the time. They included the curiously named **Tommy Liza** at the Privy Council, **Toby** at the Home Office, **Joe** at the Board of Education, and **Trillie Williams** (one source calls him 'Frilly') at the War Office. The last-named was on the official War Office payroll, and when he died the employees had a collection to pay for him to be stuffed and preserved for posterity. In that guise he appeared at the Imperial War Museum's *Animals' War* exhibition in 2007. The National Archives apparently has files dating from the 1920s from the Cabinet Office, the Cabinet War Rooms (where one mouser was called **Jumbo**), the Treasury and the Home Office with details about the appointment and subsistence allowances for various 'Chief Mousers'.

One former Treasury cat was called **Smokey**, while a fine 'marmalade' tom rejoicing in the name of Rufus of England, later became better known as **Treasury Bill**; he served under Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald (whose cat he was) from 1924 until 1930 and was a formidable mouser and ratter. He was said to bring his trophies to his boss, but when he found that they were being picked up and put by the rubbish bins in the hallway, he soon realised the proper procedure, and after that the cleaners would find the mice neatly laid out by the bins for them to deal with! There's a story that when he began to decline in his later years, becoming thin and rather languid, the Secretary to the Treasury submitted a claim to the Lords of the Treasury that Bill's food allowance was insufficient owing to a sharp rise in the cost of living, and should be increased by at least fifty per cent. Their lordships replied that after giving 'careful consideration to the matter' they were 'unable to approve a rise'. Bill himself is said to have taken matters into his own paws, and finding the door to the Chancellor's office ajar one day he walked in and exercised some of those blandishments that cats know so well how to use to get their way. Chancellor Philip Snowden – a man noted for his tight-fisted guardianship of public funds – looked at Rufus, and softened. He turned to his desk and made a note: 'Treasury vote: approve increase in cat's pay.' The budget bill for a 50% increase in the cat's pay was submitted to Parliament, debated, voted on and passed: and that is how Rufus came to be known thereafter as Treasury Bill.



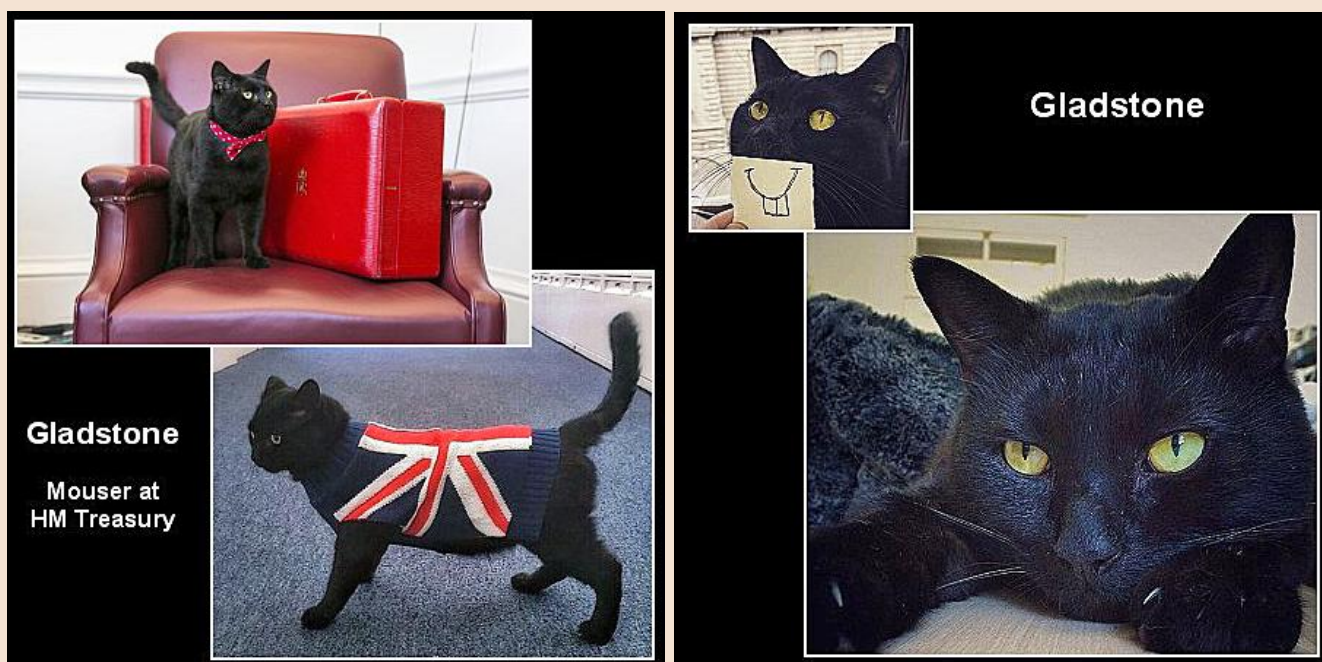
Bob was Neville Chamberlain's cat and was 'in office' under him from 1937, so was resident in Downing Street when Winston Churchill moved in as prime minister in May 1940. He was nicknamed the 'Munich Mouser', somewhat disrespectfully, by Churchill as a reference to former Prime Minister Chamberlain's ill-fated 1938 agreement with Hitler. He was, though, treated with great kindness, as Churchill was very fond of cats. Bob died in 1943 and was much mourned. The photo outside 10 Downing Street (*left*), taken from undated newsreel footage but probably around the time of the outbreak of war, may show the Mouser, but that's unconfirmed; another possibility is that

it's **Nelson**, one of Churchill's own cats, who was also black and did spend some time at No. 10. Churchill is said to have taken Nelson to his country base of Chequers when he went there, and to have fed the cat bits of smoked salmon from the dinner table when his wife Clementine wasn't looking! Apparently Nelson and the Munich Mouser were rivals at Downing Street and had some altercations.

At some point there was also **Emily** of the Home Office, apparently picked up in the street by a charwoman, but who became so wise and engaging that she always sat in at conferences with the Home Secretary.

Later there were several Home Office cats called **Peter**, and also **Peta** (see [separate page](#)). And coming right up to contemporary times, it was announced in July 2016 that a new mouser had been appointed for the Treasury. Eighteen-month-old **Gladstone** (*below*), an all-black former stray from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, was kept inside for his first few weeks and quickly made himself at home. He made great friends with the staff, who kept him supplied with his needs; and he could be tracked with an app which meant that people could check on their phone at any time to see where he was!

That doesn't seem to have helped when 'Gladders' went missing in mid-September 2018, causing much concern. However, he was back safe and sound a few days later. In January 2020 it was announced that, for health reasons, Gladstone would be 'working from home' in Essex for a while. An Instagram post said, 'I've had such a restful holiday with one of my HM Treasury humans that I'm going to be working from my new home for a while. It seems I've made such good progress as Chief Mouser that I can relax for a while and try out this remote working thing.' Gladstone's career is related in a [Wikipedia](#) article.



Nemo

When he became prime minister in 1964 Harold Wilson took the family cat — a male sealpoint Siamese called **Nemo** — with him to Downing Street. He was quite a feisty cat, not averse to a scrap; on one occasion when he got into a fight with a stray moggy, Mrs Wilson tried to part them and

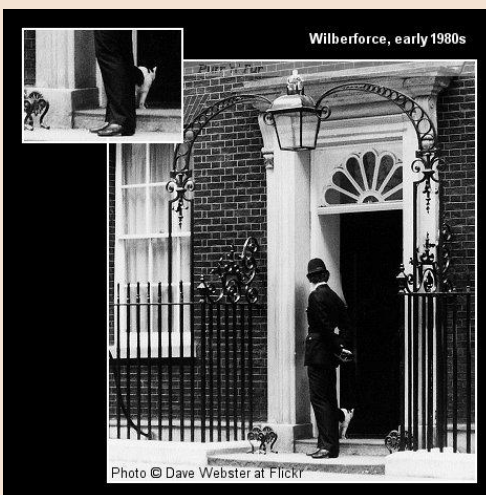
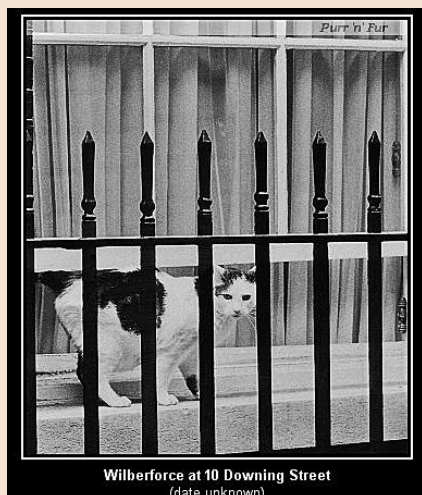
suffered a scratch that turned septic, causing her to miss an official dinner being given for the Italian prime minister. Nemo used to accompany the Wilsons when they took their annual holiday to the Scilly Isles, off the south-west coast of Cornwall.



Wilberforce

Wilberforce was just a kitten when he arrived from the Hounslow branch of the RSPCA in 1973 during Prime Minister Edward Heath's tenure. He was appointed as Office Manager's cat, with a suitable living allowance. The black-and-white feline proved to be a terrific mouser; he also outlasted several later prime ministers as well as Heath. The policeman on security duty at the front door of Number 10 had instructions to ring the bell for Wilberforce whenever he wanted to enter (*below right*). Margaret Thatcher is reputed to have bought him a tin of sardines in Moscow when she was visiting a supermarket there. When he made a TV appearance with her, it was Wilberforce who received more fan mail! Thatcher's chief press secretary, Bernard Ingham, said the cat caused him, as an asthmatic, some trouble when he came to work on Monday mornings as Wilberforce 'lounged on my desk over the weekend in between mouse-catching duties'. Wilberforce retired in 1986, after 13 years of loyal service, and went to live in the country with a retired caretaker from No. 10; he apparently devoted his time to dominating a large dog! He died in his sleep on 19 May 1988 and gained numerous appreciative obituaries in the press. He was buried near his retirement home and several former prime ministers expressed their regrets at his passing. A painting of Wilberforce can be seen at the end of this article. There's a [Wikipedia](#) article about him, and also a long account at [Groklopedia](#).

Photo of Wilberforce, below right, courtesy of [Dave Webster](#) at Flickr where it can be seen full-sized.



Humphrey



It was **Humphrey** who really brought the position of resident mouser at Downing Street to the public's attention. He was a stray, long-haired, black-and-white cat who became one of the most popular and admired cats in Great Britain. He was found by a member of staff at the Cabinet Office (70 Whitehall, next to the prime minister's London residence of No. 10 Downing Street) in October 1989, late in Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership, and remained throughout John Major's term in office (one of the few inhabitants of No. 10 to outlast Mrs T.!).

He was about a year old and, following a ballot among staff, was named after Sir Humphrey Appleby in the very popular BBC television comedy show *Yes, Minister*, and given the official title of Mouser to the Cabinet Office; his food was

paid for by the departmental budget. The cost of £100 a year was said to appeal to Mrs Thatcher because it was much cheaper than hiring a pest-control contractor (the previous one charged £4,000 a year and was said never to have caught a mouse!).

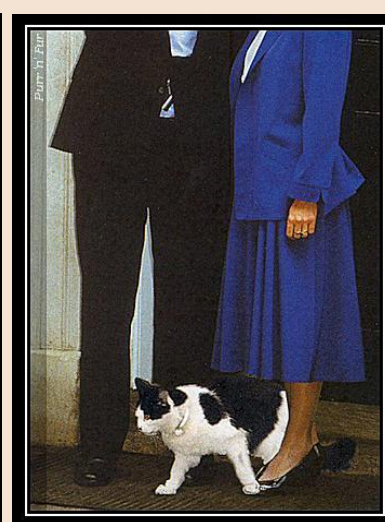
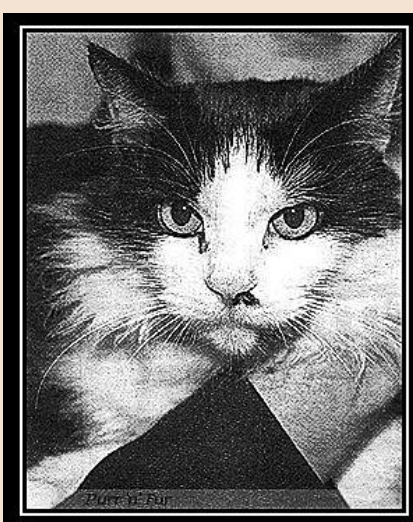
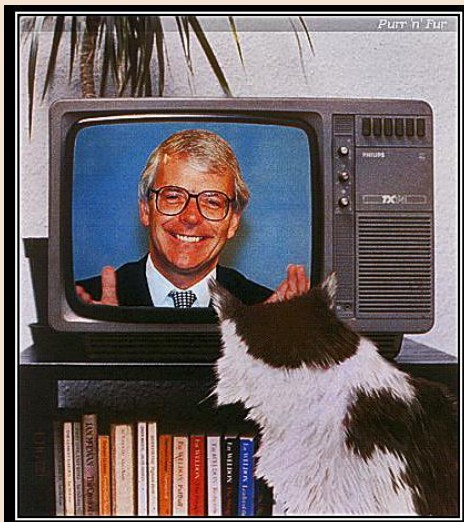
Humphrey's eight years in the corridors of power saw him mingling with the great and the good (and others), which he did with aplomb and the natural dignity of his kind; he was described as a laid-back and relaxed cat, which was probably just as well. He seemed quite unfazed by photo-calls, and paid scant attention to politicians, heads of state or even royalty — it's reported that King Hussein of Jordan was once kept waiting while a police officer removed Humphrey from the welcoming red carpet. He wandered freely between No. 10 and No. 11, the residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the adjacent Cabinet Office. One of his favourite places to curl up was on the doorkeeper's chair at no. 10, which gave a welcoming presence to people entering.



Adventures

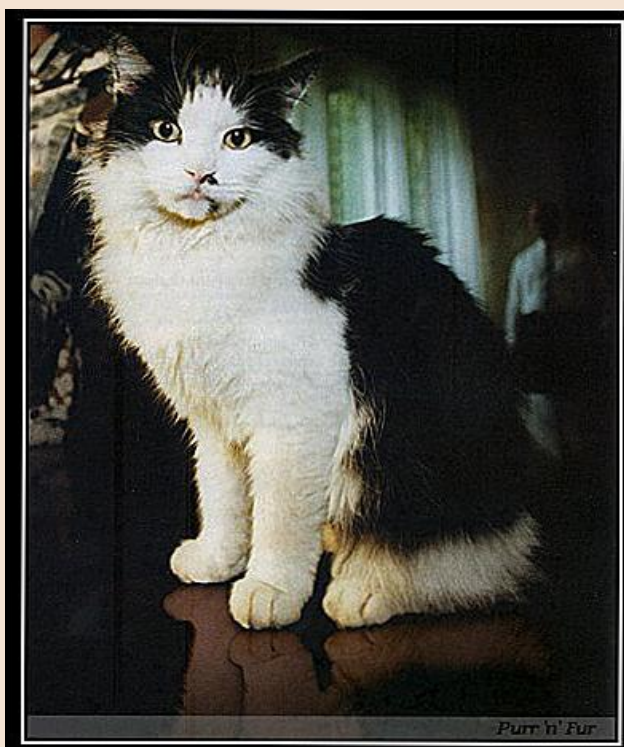
His life was not without incident, though, and when US President Bill Clinton came to visit, Humphrey apparently narrowly escaped being run over by the two-ton, armoured, presidential Cadillac, which naturally he had decided to investigate. Then in 1994, during John Major's tenure, he was accused of killing baby robins in the No. 10 garden, which caused a bit of a fuss; however, Major staunchly defended him, saying, 'It is quite certain that Humphrey is not a serial killer.'

[Note: some years later it was [revealed](#) ([archived copy](#)) that *Daily Telegraph* political editor, George Jones, fabricated the whole story about Humphrey and the robins, and the cat was never under suspicion. Mr Major had taken George to see some baby robins, but when they got to the nest the birds were dead and seemed to have been abandoned by their parents. It's possible Mr Major himself was inadvertently responsible, by disturbing the parent birds. Humphrey was exonerated.]



In 1995 the cat had his greatest adventure when he disappeared, and it was assumed that he'd died ('possibly from eating too many Civil Service biscuits', as one commentator wryly put it). But in fact he'd wandered about a mile away to the Royal Army Medical College, then at Millbank, where he was presumed to be a stray, taken in and given food and shelter. Some three months later *The Times* reported that he was probably dead and published an obituary picture — whereupon the medics realised that their 'stray', known as 'PC' ('Patrol Cat'), was actually Humphrey! (*below right*) Someone working at the College at the time recalled later that phone calls were made, a hunt ensued for the cat, who was found sleeping in the soldiers' quarters, and soon afterwards Downing Street staff arrived to collect him by car. There was international press coverage and a congratulatory message was received from America's 'First Cat', Socks Clinton. Humphrey resumed to his post as First Mouser.

It perhaps isn't so widely known that Humphrey had another adventure away from home when he was 'cat-napped' by a German travel agent, Hanni Velden, who in 1997 found him wandering around St James's Park, something he did quite often. She thought he was a stray and took him home to her apartment in a seventh-floor tower block in Lambeth. But when she took him to the vet for a check-up he was recognised by a member of the public, and when the Cabinet Office was phoned they confirmed that he'd been missing — so Hanni had to return her 'stray'. And he appeared on the 1996 and 1997 Cabinet Office Christmas cards!



Humphrey in 1995 after his sojourn at the Royal Army Medical College

Change of government . . . exit Humphrey

On 1 May 1997 a Labour government was elected, and within days rumours were circulating of moves

to be rid of Humphrey. Cherie Blair was said to dislike cats and to consider them unhygienic: even to be allergic to them. There was a storm of protest and, bowing to pressure, photos of her holding Humphrey were hastily arranged — she didn't look altogether thrilled about it (but then neither did Humphrey) — with a strenuous denial that he would be evicted.

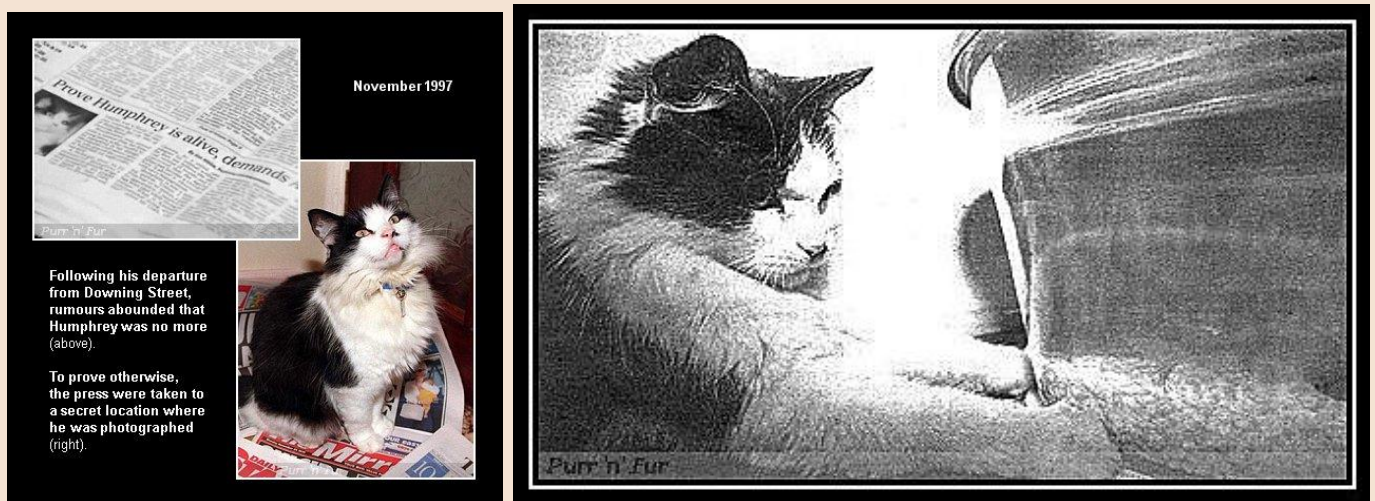
However, within six months, on 13 November 1997, he had left his prestigious residence. All kinds of political humour was bandied about:

... voting with his paws. After eight happy years under the Conservatives, he could take only six months of Labour ... ;

Perhaps, like all other groups who have suffered from Labour's broken promises, he didn't get the loving attention he was promised in May from the new occupants of Number 10; and so on.

There was even a rumour that poor Humphrey had been put to sleep (possibly for leaving puddles on Tony's carpets to express his disapproval?), but in fact it seems he was 'retiring from politics for health reasons'. He'd had a kidney complaint for some time, and his medical advisers felt it would be better for him to retire from his hectic environment and take life more easily in the suburbs. A Conservative member of Parliament asked for proof that the cat was still alive (*below left*), though, and so political journalists took up the case.

Downing Street smuggled press to a secret location in south London, including Sean Dempsey who had photographed Humphrey many times. 'He greeted me like an old friend,' said Dempsey, 'and there was no doubt it really was Humphrey.' As hostages are, he was photographed with the newspapers of the day to prove there was no trickery, and with his new pal, a goldfish.



So a political crisis was averted, and the former No. 10 feline continued to enjoy his well-earned retirement. His new owners were not identified, neither was the location; but they said he was happy, had put on weight, and that they had had no trouble with puddles.

Many years later the Blair/Humphrey rumours appeared to be confirmed by former Labour MP Chris Mullin when a volume of his diaries was published in 2011. Referring to the photo-call shortly after the 1997 election he wrote, 'There have been ugly rumours that the Blairs want him reshuffled, but yesterday's papers are full of pictures of Humphrey with Cherie assuring the world that he is safe in her hands.' A short time later, after a conversation with Mrs Blair, his diary recorded, 'I mentioned that I had seen Humphrey the cat on my visit to Number 10 yesterday. "Give him a kick from me," she said. So the rumours are true.'

Quiet end

After some years of living in retirement, perhaps dreaming of the days when he was on familiar terms with the rich and powerful, it was reported on 20 March 2006 that Humphrey had died in his sleep the previous week. He had reached the grand old age of 18.



Conservative Home's Tory Diary blog noted his passing with a quote from Roger Gale, MP, who met Humphrey on a number of visits to Downing Street during the Thatcher and Major years: 'Humphrey was often curled up on the doorkeeper's chair and a very reassuring presence to those entering No. 10 on business. We were sad when Humphrey was "retired" with the arrival of the Blairs. Humphrey clearly had a much loved and comfortable old age. We were all sorry to learn, today, of his death, and we shall all remember the Downing Street cat with great affection.'



At the beginning of 2005 many government files were released to the public for the first time under the *Freedom of Information Act*, and these included some of the papers relating to Humphrey, made available by the Cabinet Office as one very large [PDF document](#). It makes fascinating reading, but I wonder what happened to the ones before 1996? For example, I enjoyed a 1992 memo that I read of elsewhere stating about Humphrey that: 'He tends to eat little and often, no doubt because he knows he can get food whenever he wants. He is a workaholic who spends nearly all his time at the office, does not socialise a great deal or go to many parties, and has not been involved in any sex or drugs scandals that we know of.'

Perhaps one day we'll be able to read about 'Humphrey: the Early Years'!

Humphrey links *(linss checked January 2026)*

- ❖ Wikipedia: [Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office](#).
- ❖ *Independent*, Nov 1997: [Downing Street in a spin over Humphrey](#).
- ❖ Brief video clip at Getty Images, dating from Nov 1997: [Humphrey the Cat](#)
- ❖ BBC, Nov 1997: [Humphrey bids a feline farewell](#)
- ❖ BBC, Nov 1997: [Purr-fect ending fur Humphrey](#)
- ❖ *Telegraph*, Mar 2005: [Humphrey... the Downing Street dossier](#).*(archived copy)*
- ❖ BBC, Mar 2006: [Downing Street cat Humphrey dies](#).
- ❖ *Telegraph*, Mar 2006: [Humphrey: a cat's life](#).*(archived copy)*
- ❖ *Guardian* obituary, Mar 2006: [Humphrey, cat; born 1988, died 2006](#).
- ❖ There's a book containing various pictures of Humphrey going about his duties: *A Day in the Life of Humphrey*, as told by David Brawn, published by HarperCollins in 1995. In certain images Humphrey appears to be in identical poses against different backdrops, so it's 'far from certain they're 'real', although one or two are included above.

Sybil

After 10 cat-less years at the PM's residence, Humphrey had a successor when in early September 2007 a new resident of 10 Downing Street made her public debut. **Sybil** was a black-and-white female, and the Downing Street website reported that 'Sybil has arrived from Edinburgh with Chancellor Alastair Darling and his wife Margaret. She made her home in the residential quarters of Number 10, as Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his family lived in the flat above Number 11. Sybil was Downing Street's first cat since the departure of Humphrey, who retired in 1997. She has free rein to come and go around the Downing Street estate.'



The then prime minister, Gordon, and his wife Sarah confirmed via a spokesman that they were happy to have Sybil around and she would be free to wander at will over the whole premises. 'It's in the nature of things that cats are difficult to confine,' said the official. A Treasury spokesman said that Sybil was 'a confirmed mouser', so clearly she would be taking over the official mousing duties.

Sybil was apparently named after Basil Fawlty's wife in the celebrated BBC television series, *Fawlty Towers*, but (unlike the probable reaction of her namesake) Sybil the cat seemed slightly unnerved by the press call. Downing Street put up a [short video](#) at YouTube.

In November it was reported in the *Observer* that Sybil had received a large volume of mail from fans and also other cats, many enclosing photos and signing with their paw-prints. Sybil apparently responded in kind: at their own cost the Darlings had cards printed with her picture and a paw-print, which were sent out as replies.

Unfortunately Sybil's tenure was short-lived. It seems she [didn't settle well](#) (January 2009) in Downing Street, and so after about six months was taken to live with friends of Mr Darling's who lived in a quieter area. There were some reports that she'd returned to their Scottish home in Edinburgh, but as far as can be gathered, although that was what the Darlings wanted for her, it didn't happen. She died, I think in London, in July 2009 after a short illness, the nature of which I don't know. So Downing Street was cat-less again and seemed likely to remain so, even after a change of government in 2010.

Sybil links

- ❖ BBC News, Sep 2007: [No 10 gets new feline first lady.](#)
- ❖ Reuters, Sep 2007: [No. 10 Downing Street has its first cat since Humphrey.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Daily Mail, Sep 2007: [Ten years after the Humphrey hoo-ha, a cat returns to Downing Street.](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ The Telegraph, Jul 2009: [Downing Street cat Sybil dies.](#)
- ❖ Independent, Jul 2009: [Farewell to the original New Labour cat.](#) *(links checked January 2026)*



2011: time for another cat?

In January 2011 many were speculating whether another official mouser should be engaged by No. 10, after a rat was seen scurrying across the step in the background of evening-TV news reports from Downing Street. This occurred on at least two occasions during live reports by BBC and ITN correspondents, and several videos are available at YouTube and elsewhere: [here's one](#), and of course the story was also covered in the press and extensively online. Staff at No. 10 were said to be pressing for a new feline recruit, and a spokesman for David Cameron confirmed there was a 'pro-cat faction within the building'. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home helpfully pointed out that they had many rescued cats on their books, waiting to be rehomed, who would be admirable for the job. They invited the Prime Minister to choose a suitable candidate, and suggested a three-year-old tuxedo cat by the name of Crocket could be ideal.

But prospects appeared slim for another Humphrey or Sybil, or indeed Crocket, as it was also [reported](#) (*Ja. 2011 – archived copy*) that the PM would 'not be bringing back the Downing Street cat despite the fresh sightings of rats', as he was 'not particularly concerned about the rat situation'.

A short [news video](#) by *Newsround* for the CBBC children's TV channel also covered the story and included brief footage of Humphrey in his heyday (*the link works, but not the video*).

A change of heart — enter Larry

On 14 February 2011 it was reported that a new Downing Street feline staff member had, after all, been appointed. Although not officially confirmed at that stage, news reports spoke of 'insiders' indicating that the successful applicant was **Larry**, a stray from the Battersea Dogs' and Cats' Home, who had been selected from a shortlist but with David Cameron's two eldest children having the final say on which they liked best.

The media went into overdrive and by the following morning the BBC was reporting that Larry was indeed due to arrive at Number 10 later in the day to take up his duties, and that a photo-call would be held: watch the [BBC News video](#). During the afternoon there was coverage of Larry arriving in Downing Street and being taken inside No. 10 in a pet carrier. Battersea had [issued a press release](#) (*archived copy*) saying the former stray was 'a great match, because he is a very sociable cat who enjoys attention and loves human contact.' And the prospects for the rats? Battersea said, 'Our cats live in a cattery but there are usually tell-tale signs of the hunter instinct from a previous life in some cats and even in the cattery Larry showed those signs.' His age was estimated at between three and five years old, and he had been rescued in early January from the London streets where it was thought he'd been living rough for some little time. Battersea described him as 'a bit of a bruiser', but very affectionate and sociable, and sufficiently confident to settle into the busy lifestyle within the building with all its comings and goings.



Later news bulletins showed Larry exploring his new surroundings at the PM's official residence. With the attendant press and TV attention it must have been a rather nerve-wracking and bewildering experience for him — many cats would have fled the scene altogether, but on the whole he held his composure and didn't appear too unsettled. Apart, that is, from a slight slip when things became a little too overwhelming, and he [scratched a reporter](#) (*Feb. 2011 – archived copy*) as he struggled free from her arms when she picked him up for a one-to-one 'interview'! Some lovely images came out of

the photo-call, two of which are reproduced here (below *left, and above right*). By the end of the day in Britain, news of Larry's arrival, photos and videos had circled the globe online. Within even less time at least three [Twitter accounts](#) (*archived copy*) had also been set up claiming to be Larry.



A *Guardian* political correspondent, after checking with No. 10, [noted in his blog](#) that Larry was 'for Downing Street'; in other words, his status would be that of an office cat rather than a family pet or an official civil-service cat as his predecessors had been. As such the cost of his food and upkeep do not come out of the public purse, but from staff at the building who also share in his care and welfare. At the time it was said he'd be able to access almost all parts of Nos. 10 and 11, to sleep where he wished, and have the run of the enclosed gardens. Early indications were that Larry showed every sign of being able to adjust to his new surroundings and situation; indeed, a No. 10 spokesman said Larry was 'chilled'.

Shortly after his arrival a story was circulated that his former owner had stepped forward after seeing his story in the media. 'Margaret Sutcliffe' claimed Larry was in fact 'Jo' who had disappeared a few months previously, and that she 'nearly died' when she saw his photos. The tale went that her nephew 'Tim' had begun a Facebook page to campaign for Larry's return and several hundred people had already joined, some saying they had written to Downing Street in support. The *Daily Mail* and others ran with the story, and it was quickly reproduced at many online sites. However, it turned out the whole thing had been a deliberate spoof to draw attention to 'churnalism'.



Mousing

It wasn't until one day in late April 2011 that Larry was observed climbing in through a Downing Street window [with a mouse](#) clamped in his jaws. He was said to have dumped it unceremoniously at the feet of the secretaries, and after their initial shock they gave him a cheer, as it was the first mouse he was known to have caught. In June Mr Cameron said the total count had risen to [three](#) (June 2011), so evidently Larry had been quietly getting on with his job! (But see below ...).

He did, though, celebrate the wedding of Prince William to Catherine Middleton on 28 April, when he was seen sporting around his neck a natty bow in the British colours (*below*). On 25 May 2011 there was more excitement for Larry when he [met Barack Obama](#) (*below left*) during the American President and First Lady's state visit to Britain. On behalf of the US Government he was also presented with a replica rat which seemed to meet with his approval! David Cameron revealed that Larry was 'a bit nervous' around most men, but had 'liked Obama'.



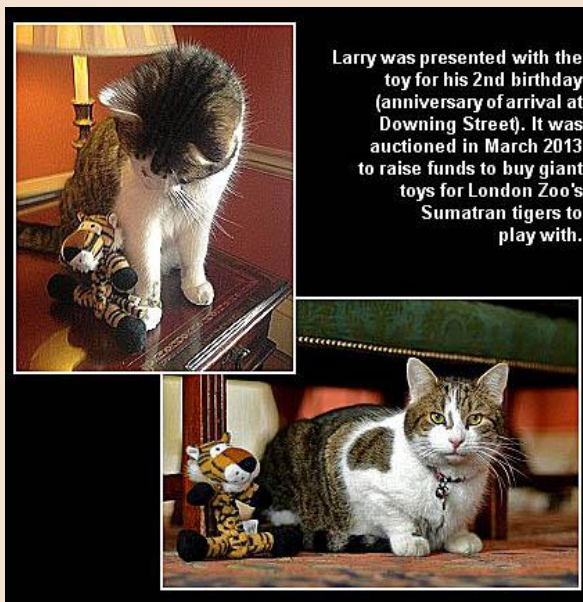
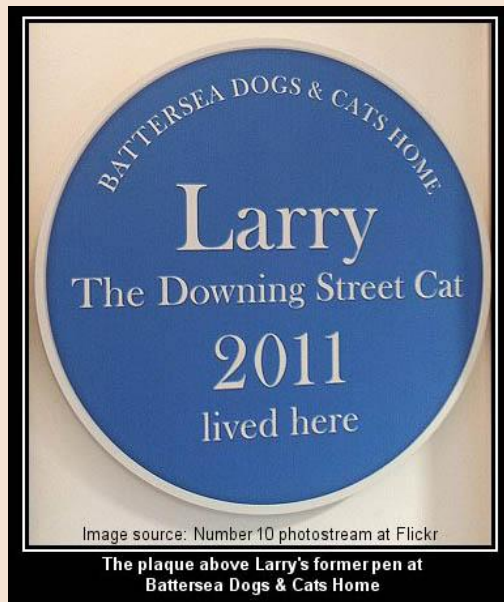
It was reported in late November 2011 that Larry was not fulfilling his duty well in terms of catching mice, although the rat problem had diminished. He was said to spend too much time either sleeping or visiting his 'girl friend', a cat called Maisie, in St James's Park!

Larry also managed to get himself into Google Street View! Downing Street was visited and filmed in June 2012, and by chance No 10's cat-in-residence was snoozing outside the door at the time.



A 'blue plaque'

It's emerged that, following the choice of Larry to be the new Downing Street cat in early 2011, the Battersea Cats and Dogs Home, from where he came, mounted a blue plaque beside the pen he had occupied. An 'official' blue plaque in the UK is a permanent sign installed in a public place as a historical marker to draw attention to a link between that location and some famous person or event, but there is nothing to stop organisations putting up their own plaques, as was the case here. It's not clear when the Battersea plaque was unveiled, but it was in place by October 2012.



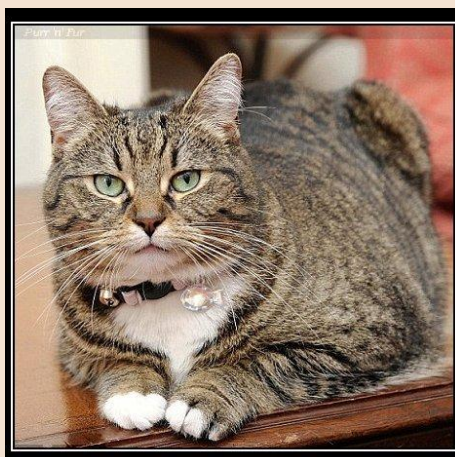
Freya

A second cat in Downing Street

During June 2012 it was announced that **Freya**, a handsome tabby with superb whiskers, had been found after three years and was taking up residence again with George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and his family, who also currently lived in Downing Street. Long before they moved there, and when she was only a few months old, Freya had disappeared, and after searching for her and putting up posters to no avail, they assumed she had been irretrievably lost, or possibly run over. It turned out that she'd been in a garden not far from the Osbornes' permanent home in Notting Hill, where she had been looked after and fed by a neighbour who hadn't seen the posters. Only when a visit to the vet revealed a microchip was it realised who she belonged to, and she was duly installed in Downing Street. She was said to have settled in happily and to be getting on well with her family, the staff – and Larry.

Larry forced to job share ...

In September 2012 it seems that Freya took over the official mousing duties and side-lined Larry, who hadn't exactly distinguished himself in the mouse-hunting business since his arrival at No. 10 in early 2011. The crunch came when Mr Cameron reportedly found Larry asleep on his chair in his study, while a mouse ran across the room. He attempted to wake Larry to spur him into action, but all the feline could manage was to open one eye — and he didn't budge an inch. The prime minister therefore drafted in tabby Freya as the new Mouser of State to patrol Numbers 10, 11 and 12, although to avoid any hurt feelings the situation was described as a 'job share'. The two cats had a sort of armed neutrality towards each other, although a photo was published of them having a bit of a [sparring match](#) on one occasion (Oct. 2012).



I don't know whether or not there was a dramatic reduction in the rodent population in Downing Street since Freya's takeover. In June 2013, though, it was reported that she'd been found to have [gained access](#) (*archived copy*) to some of the government's most secure buildings, such as the Foreign Office, as well as trying to get into the Treasury and a naval command centre. There was speculation that perhaps Freya had been recruited to spy — had perhaps even been bugged, by a foreign power.

In December 2013 Freya had to begin getting used to sharing her home with the Osbornes' new canine acquisition, Lola, a Bichon Frise puppy. And then in August 2014 it was reported that she had been 'clipped' by a car while out in Whitehall a mile or so from her home. Her injuries were not serious and after a visit to the vet she made a full recovery and returned to Downing Street.

... but then Freya left

This was far from the first time the feline had gone a-wandering; apparently it was quite usual for her to visit Westminster's 'Red Lion' pub in the evening, in spite of having to cross four lanes of busy traffic to get there, and she would be brought home by one of the barmaids. In May 2014 she was found roaming the streets of south London by a charity worker; when her identity was discovered she was chauffeur-driven back to base. Anyway, by November the Osbornes had decided that her wanderings put her at too much risk and it would be better if she left Downing Street. So Freya retired to a home in the Kent countryside with a kind member of staff, and her former family were to receive regular updates.



Larry was left to continue with mouse-catching duties and became a permanent fixture at No. 10.

Larry's charity work — and a decline in popularity?

As with [Street Cat Bob](#), Larry took part in March 2013 in a scheme run by ZSL (London Zoo) to raise money to buy giant toys for the zoo's Sumatran tigers, Jae Jae and Melati, to play with in their new Tiger Territory, opened in the same month by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Certain well-known cats, including Larry, were given tiger toys to play with, publicity shots were taken and then the toys and 'pawtographed' photos were auctioned on eBay (*photo above right*).

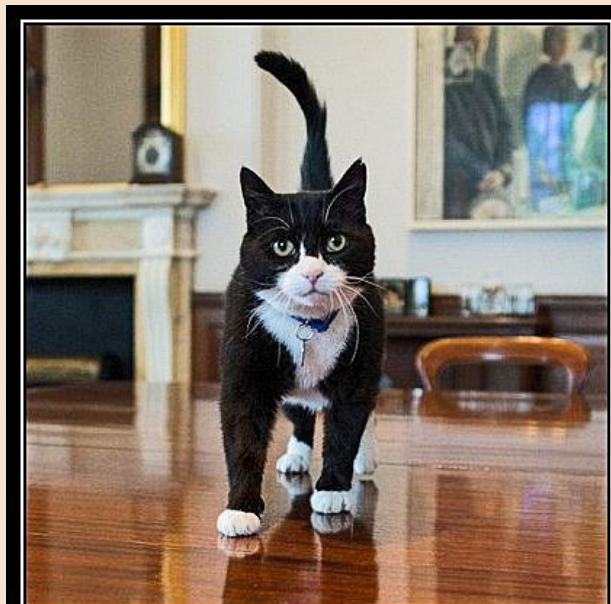
In June 2013 it was reported that Larry was considering running for London mayor! However, by September there were rumours that tensions were growing between Prime Minister David Cameron and Larry, with a report that Cameron was fed up with his suit getting covered in cat hair and that the Camerons were said not to like the Downing Street cat very much, amid suggestions that the pet is just a public-relations prop. The public strongly supported Larry on Twitter, and in his own feed the Prime Minister denied the rumours, insisting that he and Larry get on 'purr-fectly well'.

Then Palmerston arrived.

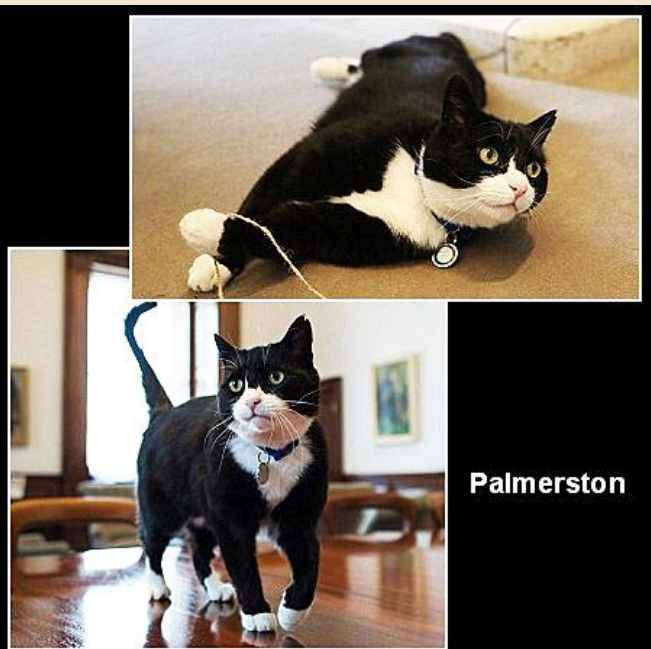
Palmerston

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) building in King Charles Street, close to No. 10, is another old building with a rodent problem. At the suggestion of Downing Street, in mid-April 2016 the FCO recruited a feline mouser of their own: enter **Palmerston**, a two-year-old black-and-white moggy who had been found wandering, hungry, underweight and without a microchip, and like Larry had ended up at Battersea Dogs' and Cats' Home. He was described as a confident cat who liked being with people, and soon made himself at home in the FCO, with his first mouse catch reported within a couple of weeks. He was named after Lord Palmerston, a former British Foreign Secretary.

The then Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, faced questions in the House of Commons as to whether Palmerston the cat was a spy, possibly a mole or 'sleeper' working for the European Union or a foreign power, and whether he had been checked by the security services. Hammond replied, 'He is definitely not a mole and I can categorically assure you that he has been regularly vetted. As for being a sleeper, he is definitely a sleeper, I am told very often in my office.'



Palmerston



Palmerston

In mid-July 2016 the press reported several 'spats' between Palmerston and Larry of No. 10, after the latter had 'trespassed' into the grounds of the FCO. There had been earlier noisy stand-offs between the pair, but then things became physical and the fur started flying. The rivals didn't seem to come to an agreement and sort out their territorial claims, as cats usually do.

Stress

In early December 2019 it was reported that Palmerston had returned from six months' 'leave', when he had been living with the private secretary of Sir Simon McDonald, the senior civil servant responsible for the cat's well-being. Back in July Palmerston had been suffering from stress as a result of too many people constantly picking him up, and overfeeding him, and he had licked much of the fur off his front legs. He was not, as one rumour had it, 'close to death', but he needed a break.

Returned to full health, 'happy and full of energy', according to Sir Simon, he' was back at work – but under a strict regime. A statement said, 'I'm happy to announce that I will be returning to my Chief Mouser duties at the Foreign Office! New guidance – the Palmerston Protocols – will govern my care at the FCP to make sure it's working for me.' Four rules were proclaimed by Sir Simon: no one except his carers must feed him (no more slipping him Dreamies!); his movements were to be restricted to the 'Palmerston Zone', rather than having the run of the whole building; everyone must respect the cat's personal space, and let him decide whether he wants to interact with them or not; and when he's in Palmerston HQ (Sir Simon's office area), that was his refuge and he wasn't to be disturbed. Sir Simon added that if staff didn't cooperate with the new rules, Palmerston would be permanently retired. He was around six years old in late 2019, so approaching 'cat middle age'

[Palmerston at Twitter](#) (lots of photos) | See also [here](#) and [here](#) (both Aug. 2020).

During the coronavirus crisis of early 2020, Palmerston again had a break and was said to be 'climbing trees and supervising mice' in Hampshire!

Retirement

Finally, in August 2020, it was announced that Palmerston, aka 'Diplomog' – age uncertain – would be taking his [retirement](#) at the end of the month, after four and a half years in post. In a letter 'he' wrote to Simon McDonald he said that he wanted to spend more time relaxing away from the limelight. 'I have enjoyed climbing trees and patrolling the fields around my new home in the countryside,' it said. 'I will miss hearing the footsteps of an Ambassador and sprinting from my hideout to see who it is ... but although I am ending my formal role here I will always be an ambassador for the UK.' The full text of the letter is below:

Sir Simon McDonald KCMG KCVO
Permanent Under-Secretary
King Charles Street



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

7 August 2020

Dear Simon,

After four years serving as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Chief Mouser, I believe the time has come for me to go into retirement so I can spend more time relaxing away from the limelight.

The spread of coronavirus around the world has caused many, like me, to begin working from home. I assure you that I have been as diligent as ever. While I have not been able to catch the King Charles Street mice from afar, my diplomatic efforts on engaging the mouse species have seen a significant uptick. I have pawed numerous memorandums and been on the winning side of many hard-fought negotiations. My diplomatic craft has had positive results.

I have found life away from the front line more relaxed, quieter, and easier. I have enjoyed climbing trees and patrolling the fields around my new home in the countryside. The family in my new home have also been pleasingly assiduous in providing for my every need. Of course I love the hustle and bustle of the office. I will miss hearing the footsteps of an Ambassador and sprinting to my hideout to see who it is. My signature move: pretending to be asleep while overhearing all the foreign dignitaries' conversations, will be a major loss for our intelligence gathering. But as I grow older, I must take a step back from diplomatic duties and enjoy some me-time.

I have been delighted to meet representatives from all over the world and I hope that I have done you proud in putting the UK's best foot, or paw, forward in each interaction. My 105,000 twitter followers show that even those with four legs and fur have an important part to play in the UK's global effort. I have championed our work, built our relationships, and celebrated the diversity of our staff. I have also set up my own parallel network: our diplocats and diplodogs have been excellent ambassadors who, I have faith, will continue their exemplary efforts without me.

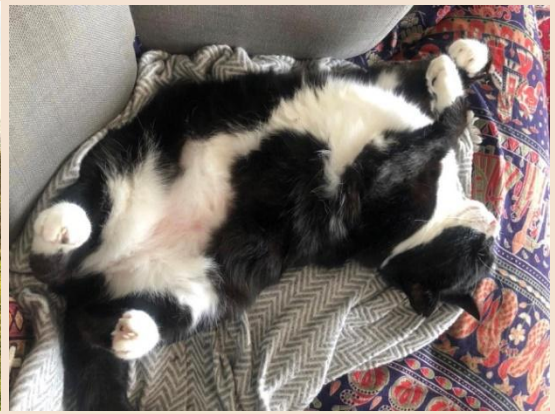
Although I am ending my formal role here, I will always be an ambassador for the UK and the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Yours,



Palmerston





A new job

In early 2025 it was announced that Palmerston had been 'lured out of retirement' to take up a post 3500 miles away – In Bermuda! His human, Andrew Murphy, with whom he'd been living, had been appointed governor of the territory, and Palmerston accompanied him as 'feline relations consultant'. It was said he 'would attend only the meetings he deemed important, offering advice when necessary and indulging in well-earned naps.' , [BBC News](#) | See also [this link](#) (both Feb. 2025)



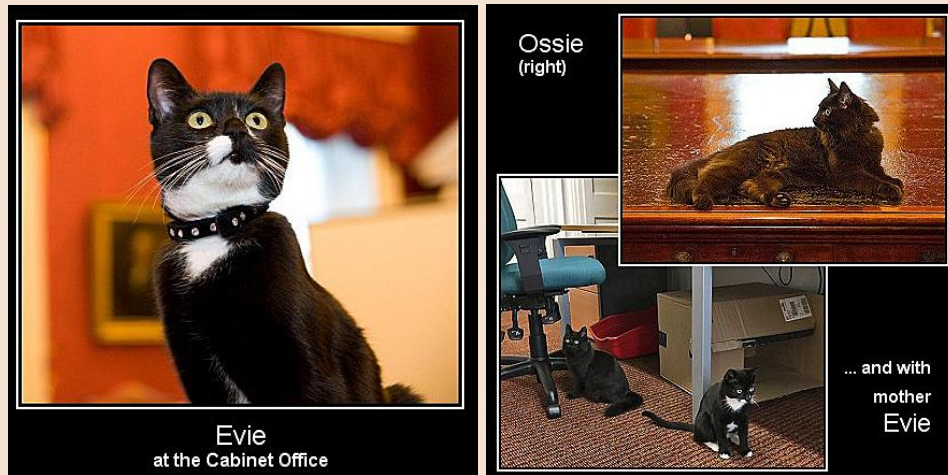
Update: Palmerston died in February 2026; a cause wasn't given but he was only 13, which isn't a great age for a cat these days. His official tribute (there were many others) read: 'Palmerston, Diplocat extraordinaire, passed away peacefully on 12 February. 'Palmy' was a special member of the Government House team in Bermuda, and a much loved family member. He was a wonderful companion with a gentle nature, and will be sorely missed.'

[ITV News](#) (includes video) | [LBC News](#) | [BBC News](#)



Two more new arrivals

In December 2016 two new staff members, **Evie** and **Ossie**, arrived in the Cabinet Office, bringing the total of government felines at that time to five! The Office approached the Celia Hammond Animal Trust (CHAT) asking for two indoor cats for extra mousing duties, so the most important thing was to try to find cats that would be able to live in harmony with Larry (bearing in mind his somewhat fearsome reputation), should they ever be allowed to venture outside. Because it's such a huge building, CHAT was initially concerned that they wouldn't be able to find their way around — but they needn't have worried. For the first couple of weeks the cats had their base in a very plush and comfortable office, and soon learned their way around the building very well. They visit various offices where they have their admirers and no mice have been seen in the Press Office (a particular trouble spot earlier) since their arrival, as simply the presence of the cats has deterred the rodents.



Evie and Ossie are a mother and son (now neutered, of course), who were rescued by CHAT as strays living on the streets of East London. Evie arrived with three kittens and while nervous in the beginning, it soon became clear that she was a very friendly, calm and sweet-natured cat. Two of her kittens were rehomed together, but CHAT was determined that Evie would keep one of her kittens. They have been named by the Cabinet Office after two political figures, Dame Evelyn Sharp (Evie) and Sir Edward Osmotherly (Ossie). After a few weeks in their new home they were reported to have settled down well and were, indeed, being thoroughly spoiled!.

During the coronavirus crisis of 2020, Evie and Ossie remained in post and were 'continuing their important work while observing social-distancing guidelines'. They seem to prefer indoor life to going outside. Ossie had a close call during 2022 when he [ate some lily leaves](#), which are toxic to cats; he was rushed to the vet's and fortunately made a full recovery. Evie had a [Twitter](#) account, but it was last used in late 2023.

Ossie was in the mews again when he fell off a cabinet in April 2026 and dislocated a toe. A whip-round in Downing Street paid for his X-rays and treatment, and he was expected to make a full recovery. See article in [The Sun](#).



See [here](#) for a plan showing where the various Westminster pets are located, as of late 2016 (courtesy of *The Telegraph*).

Back to Larry ...

A change of prime minister in July 2016 could have seen a change in Larry's status, but he stayed on and carried on with his rodent patrols under Mrs May's jurisdiction (and from December 2019 Boris Johnson's. Liz Truss's short tenure, and then Rishi Sunak's). Downing Street staff are said to be very fond of him, and it is they who pay for his upkeep, holding special events to raise money

By February 2021 Larry had been in post for 10 years, 'longer than the leader of any current political party', as his Twitter account declared, and was serving under his third prime minister, His popularity on social media certainly wasn't declining! There's a brief compilation of some of Larry's 'public moments' [here](#) (May 2021) and a marking of his 10 years [here](#).

By mid-2024 Larry was serving under his sixth prime minister and was thought to be about 17 years old. Some concerns had been expressed about his health, but they seemed ill-founded and he appeared to be as active as ever apart from a little arthritis. He had become a British institution and was frequently reported on in the news, with many excellent photos being available. There was a very popular [Twitter](#) account in his name, noted for its acerbic political comments. There's a nice summary of his first 12 years [here](#) (Feb.2023) ... and a report about him at 18 [here](#) (May 2025 – use Edge).

By February 2026 Larry had served 15 years in office; there's a comprehensive account with many photos at [ITV News](#). And in early April 2026 he [caught](#) his (third?) mouse!

Another change of government

In July 2024 a Labour government was elected, following 14 years of Conservative rule. The new prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, had a family cat called **Jojo**, who moved into 10 Downing Street with the family (*below left*). Other than that he's a neutered male rescue cat, I haven't seen any information about him. Sir Keir says that in the family the cat gets more respect than he does himself! It was proving difficult to arrange a cat-flap, because of the bomb-proof entrance door, so instead a wooden ramp has been installed at the back leading from a small cat-sized window into the garden.. As far as I know, Jojo hadn't so far encountered Larry.

In September 2024 matters were further complicated when it was announced that a new Siberian kitten, named **Prince**, was also taking up residence with the Starmer family (*below right*).



Further links for Larry and his Westminster colleagues

- ❖ Channel 4 TV News, Feb 2011: [Cameron 'appoints' Larry the cat as Downing Street ratter](#) - includes video clip with brief footage of Humphrey and Sybil also (*video doesn't play*)
- ❖ *The Guardian*, Feb 2011: [Larry the cat arrives at Downing Street - in pictures](#).
- ❖ Sky News, Feb 2011 (archive copy): [PM 'Delight' At Cat To Tackle Rat Problem](#).
- ❖ *The Telegraph*, Feb 2011: [David Cameron finds a job for an 'urbane killer' in Downing Street](#)
- ❖ Apr 2011: British folk singer and guitarist Alan ('Big Al') Whittle composed a little ditty called *Larry the Cat*, available to listen to at [SoundCloud](#).

- ❖ *Daily Mail*, Jun 2011: [Larry the Downing Street cat feels the long boot of the law](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ BBC News, interview with David Cameron, Jun 2011: [Downing Street cat Larry liked Obama says Cameron](#) - includes video clip. *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *Daily Mail*, Sep 2011: [Larry the No 10 cat fails his first test as PM \(prime mouser\)](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Set of images of Freya taken by Andrew Parsons/i-Images at No 11, Oct 2012: [No 11 Cat](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ 10 Downing Street's history page: [Larry, Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office](#). *(right at the end)*
- ❖ London Zoo press release, Mar 2013: [Toys for tigers at ZSL London Zoo](#). *(archived copy)*:
- ❖ *Huffington Post*, Mar 2013: [George Osborne Tweets Picture Of Cat Inside Red Budget Briefcase](#).
- ❖ *Daily Mail*, Jun 2013: [The purr-fect spy?](#) *(archived copy)*.
- ❖ *Daily Mail*, Sep 2013: ['We get on purr-fectly'](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ ITV, Dec 2013: [George Osborne welcomes new resident to Downing St.](#)
- ❖ BBC News, Aug 2014: [Chancellor George Osborne's cat Freya hit by car](#).
- ❖ *The Spectator* blog, Aug 2014: [The nine lives of Freya, the Chancellor's cat](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *The Independent*, Nov 2014: [George Osborne's family cat Freya sent away from Downing Street to Kent](#).
- ❖ BBC News, Jul 2016: [Larry the cat escapes Downing Street eviction](#)
- ❖ *The Guardian*, Jul 2016: [Larry the cat will not be evicted from No 10, Cabinet Office confirms](#)
- ❖ *The Telegraph*, Jul 2016: [Claws out in Whitehall as Larry the cat takes on Palmerston](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *The Telegraph*, Dec 2016: [New cats Evie and Ossi8e join Westminster moggies as Cabinet Office mousers](#) *(archived copy)*..
- ❖ BBC News, Dec. 2016: [Cabinet Office cats Evie and Ossie join Whitehall mousers](#)
- ❖ *Guardian*, Dec 2016: [Mew-turn by Cabinet Office as government gets two new cats](#)
- ❖ Facebook: [Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office](#) - maintained by a fan, not an 'official' page
- ❖ YouTube clip featuring Larry, Nov. 2023,: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQmpE_cys9g *(unavailable Jan. 2036)*
- ❖ *The Atlantic*: [Larry's 12 Years as Chief Mouser in pictures](#)
- ❖ BBC, June 2024: ['The List: 7 times Larry caused mischief'](#)
- ❖ Express Tribune, Jan 2025: [Britain's Most Famous Cat Hits 19](#) *(links checked January 2026)*

The artist **Frances Broomfield** created delightful paintings of Downing Street mousers Wilberforce (*below left*) and Humphrey (*right*) in 198 and 1995 respectively, and she kindly gave permission for images to be displayed at Purr 'n' Fur. The images are copyright © Frances Broomfield, and may **not** be copied or reproduced elsewhere without her permission. It's fun to see the addition of a robin to the painting of Humphrey, a nod to the incident detailed in our account above when he was accused of being a serial killer!



The Speaker's cats

Mention should be made here of the cats belonging to Sir Lindsay Hoyle, elected Speaker of the House of Commons in November 2019 and a lifelong animal lover; he says relaxing with his cat helps to relieve the stresses of his job. The Hoyle household also includes a tortoise and a parrot. At the time of his election, Sir Lindsay had a ginger Maine Coon called **Patrick** (*below*), but he died in March 2022, aged 12.



In June of 2022 a new Maine Coon kitten, a tabby called after former Labour prime minister **Attlee**, made his appearance. He has grown into a fine cat and has become well-known around the Palace of Westminster (where the Speaker has his official residence)_ He even checked the House of Commons for rodents before King Charles' coronation, but apparently didn't find any.



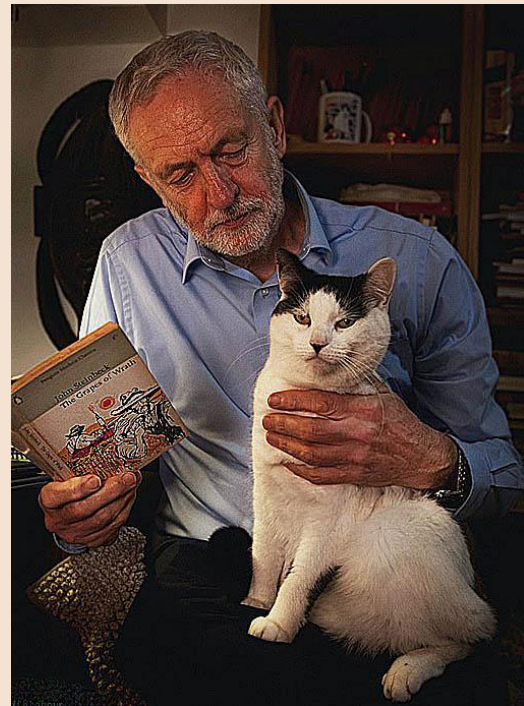
And then in July 2024 a second cat was taken in, a black cat with Bengal markings 'who just turned up at our house one day', said Sir Lindsay (not clear whether he meant his Lancashire home or his official Westminster residence). The newcomer has been named **Clem**, presumably also after Clement Attlee.



[Guardian](#) (June 2022) | [Independent](#) (July 2024)

Opposition cat

I think it would be appropriate here to also mention **El Gato**, the cat belonging to former Labour Party leader and Leader of the Opposition (from 2015 to 2020). Jeremy Corbyn and his wife Laura Alvarez. He had been with the Corbyn household since arriving as a kitten in 2010, so must have been 14 or 15 when he died on the 19th of January 2025,. As Corbyn never became prime minister, El Gato never made it into Downing Street, but would likely have made a very good 'Downing Street cat'. Jeremy said, 'It's with great sadness that I have to announce that El Gato died on Sunday. He gave joy to many throughout his life. He was happy, gentle, and full of personality. Life will not be the same without El Gato's company and friendship. We will miss him dearly.'



There's a full obituary for the beloved cat [here \(archived copy\)](#)..

More links about UK Government pets: [National Archives](#) (June 2016) | [Tatler](#) (July 2024 | [Politico](#) (Aug. 2023)

There's a brief summary of Downing Street cats at this short (11-minute) [YouTube](#) video.



Humphrey

Note

Perhaps less well-known, but also 'employed' by the British government at the Home Office over a period of nearly a century, were [several cats named Peter](#).

Humphrey's American feline counterpart at the White House, [Socks Clinton](#) who died in 2009 aged almost 20 years, may also be of interest. For **Dorofei**, a cat who lived at the Kremlin in Moscow for a while, see **Fragments 11**.

* * * * *