



INTERNATIONAL
HEADQUARTERS
OF THE ESU

Dartmouth House



The English-Speaking Union

The Owners

Unknown – 1757

the Dowager Duchess
of Chandos, Marchioness
of Carnarvon

1758 – 1771

The 2nd Duke of Chandos,
Marquis of Carnarvon

1772 – 1774

The 3rd Duke of Chandos,
Marquis of Carnarvon

1776 – 1778

William Woodley

1778 – 1822

The 5th Earl of Stamford

1822 – 1828

The Dowager Duchess,
Countess of Stamford

1828 – 1830

The 2nd Marquis of Bute

1830 – 1867

Captain (later Admiral)
George Ferguson

1867 – 1898

Edward Charles Baring
(later Lord Revelstoke)

1900 – 1918

The Earl of Dartmouth

1923 – 1926

The Hon. Mrs Robert Lindsay

1926 – present

The English-Speaking
Union of the Commonwealth –
now the headquarters of the
ESU worldwide.

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE ESU

Dartmouth House

Dartmouth House was purchased by the ESU for the sum of £45,000 from The Hon. Mrs Robert Lindsay in 1926, and formally opened as the London headquarters by the then prime minister Sir Stanley Baldwin on 22 February 1927 – the 195th anniversary of George Washington's birthday.

It is the international headquarters of the ESU in the heart of Mayfair, just off Berkeley Square.



HISTORY OF DARTMOUTH HOUSE AND CHARLES STREET

The land on which Dartmouth House stands was formerly farmland. At the time of the Domesday Book (1086) the land was within the Manor of Eye held by Geoffrey de Mandeville. Shortly afterwards he gave the land to the Abbey of Westminster in whose hands it remained until 1536, when Henry VIII confiscated it prior to the dissolution of Westminster Abbey.

In 1554, the part of the Manor known as Brick Close (so called because of clay deposits), was sold to two gentlemen, one of whom, William Jennings, bequeathed it to his grandson who held it until the first Lord Berkeley acquired it in 1675. John Berkeley (b.1607) was a Royalist commander who was rewarded with a barony after leading his troops to victory at Stratton in Cornwall. In 1664 he bought a field for his town house – Berkeley House on Piccadilly, described by the diarist John Evelyn as “a sweete place”.

Apart from the farmhouse and a few farm buildings, Brick Close was open fields. When the Berkeley family sold part of it in 1683 to a syndicate consisting of John Hinde and others, it was known as Hay Hill Farm and consisted of 28 acres. One of the conditions of the sale was that the land should be developed.

As well as being a property developer, Hinde also held several government offices. Upon his death it was discovered that he had improperly “borrowed” about £100,000 from the Exchequer and had run up further debts of £71,000. The Crown therefore seized the land in compensation, though in 1702 Hay Hill reverted back to the Berkeley family following an action in the Chancery Court in which it was proved that Hinde had not fulfilled his obligations to develop the site.



The area was developed by John Berkeley's grandson who built Berkeley Square, Bruton Lane, Bruton Street, Bruton Place, Hill Street and following that, Charles Street. It is thought that Charles Street was named after a member of the Berkeley family. D.H. Johnson wrote,

“It has been said that Charles Street was named after Charles, Viscount Falmouth, a brother of the first Lord Berkeley, but possibly the name commemorates either Charles, second Lord Berkeley, or a younger brother, so named, of the fifth Lord Berkeley, who was living when the street was laid out”.

Charles Street was laid out in 1675. The first recorded ratepayer of No. 37 was the Dowager Duchess of Chandos, Marchioness of Carnarvon in 1755, widow of the first Duke, who is remembered for his association with Handel and Pope. The property remained in the possession of the Duke's of Chandos until 1774. Subsequent owners of No. 37 were the Earl of Stamford and the Marquis of Bute. Residents of No. 38 include Sir John Hynds Cotton in 1757, and Sir Thomas and Lady Hesketh – cousin of, and chief source of biographical information about, the poet Cowper.

The original site and premises can be traced back to 1755. At the time the Tybourne brook still lay open at the south end of

Berkeley Square, and was so evil smelling that it was described at the time as “a common sewer”. The brook runs under Dartmouth House and caused serious damage to papers stored in the basement in the 1990s.

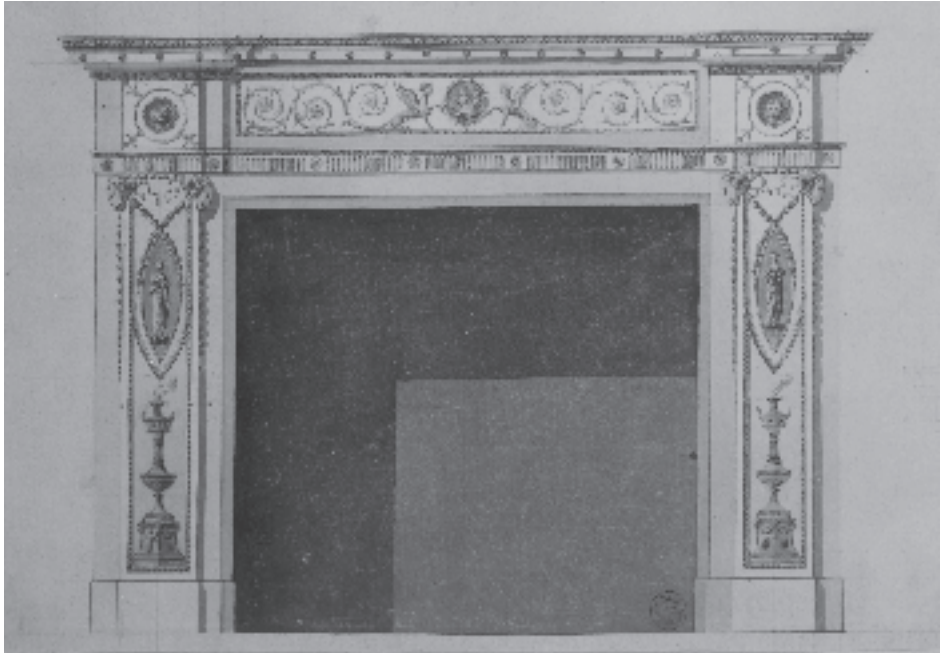
Berkeley Square was the haunt of thieves and violence was common. A spate of street crime in 1755 saw a coach robbed and its occupants relieved of watches and a substantial amount of money. A few nights later, a Charles Street resident, John Goodyer, was returning from the Cocoa Tree Club in Pall Mall in a sedan chair when he was stopped by two footpads. His hinder chairman was shot dead attempting to defend himself and his employer. It was about this time that Dr. Johnson wrote in his poem ‘London’:

*“Prepare for death if here at night you roam
And sign your will before you sup from home”*

There is little recorded history of the houses, other than details of rate payers, although it is recorded that in 1866, the supervising architect was rebuked by the Board of Works Committee for attempting to put sides in the portico at No. 37 without permission.

Above: The Wedgwood Room and the Revelstoke Room circa 1980

Opposite page:
Original architectural drawing of the fireplace in the Long Drawing Room



LORD REVELSTOKE'S CONVERSION OF NO. 37 & NO. 38

Edward Charles Baring bought No. 37 Charles St in 1870. He became Lord Revelstoke (1st Baron Revelstoke of Membrand) in 1885 and in 1890 he purchased No. 38 in order to turn the two Georgian houses into one larger house to create a showcase for his collection of Louis XV furniture and art. No expense was spared to create a home of "rococo opulence" in the Anglo-French style, popular during the late Victorian era.

His mother was the cousin of the founder of the Washington family in the United States, thus the remote connection between Lord Dartmouth and George Washington.

Lord Revelstoke employed William Cubitt and Co for the exterior construction work which included; the conversion of the two properties, the re-facing of the building in

stone, the building of the courtyard and mews house. Mayfair furnishing and decorating company William Turner Lord were employed to undertake the interior design, "the refitting of 37/8 Charles St for one of the most conspicuous consumers of the decade was a commission of unprecedented size and importance and...was crucial in establishing the firm's reputation as the leading interior decorators of Mayfair".

Lord Revelstoke's London home was an amalgamation of styles, so expertly designed by William Allwright, William Turner Lord's designer, that it is often difficult to identify what is old and new. This was not unusual for the style and the taste of the late Victorians, "much panelling from decaying Parisian hotels have been shipped to England, cleaned re-gilded and neatly made up for the fashionable drawing rooms of the period."

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Although at one time it was thought that the fireplaces were 19th century copies, they are in fact 18th century originals, the most exciting being a Robert Adams originally located at Derby House, Grosvenor Square.

New features designed especially for the house included, the Belgian marble staircase, the exterior iron railings (possibly Coalbrookdale), the marble courtyard and an unusually grand mews house, particularly stylish even for Mayfair.

The panels in the Wedgwood Room were painted by Pierre Victor Galland (1822-1892) a popular artist of the time, who painted ceilings and panels for a number of houses in Europe and America. On close inspection one can see that Galland has cleverly worked Barings name into the design.

Maurice Baring (1874-1945), Lord Revelstoke's son, later to become an author and diplomat and great friend of G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and Sarah Bernhardt, offered a view of life at Dartmouth House and Membrand, the country house boasting its own yacht and stream launch, in his autobiography Puppet Show of Memory. At the nursery at Dartmouth House, Maurice and two of his seven siblings were looked after by two nurses and two nursery maids.

WORK ON NO. 37 CEASES WITH BARING CRISIS OF 1890S

In November 1890, a crisis at Barings Bank curtailed expenditure and all building and design work ceased although the house had not been completed. A final payment was paid to the builder in 1893, and the same summer Christie Manson and Woods held a three day auction of Lord Revelstoke's furnishings and object d'art. He continued to live at No. 37 until his death from diabetes in 1897.

NO. 37 AND LORD DARTMOUTH: 1900 - 1918

Lord Dartmouth (6th Earl of Dartmouth) was the next owner. The most significant changes to the house took place in 1900 - the conversion of three drawing rooms on the first floor to two rooms, now called the Long Drawing Room and Small Drawing Room. These rooms have fine ornate ceilings incorporating the crest of the Dartmouth Family and the year 1900. Lord Dartmouth also had his name engraved over the front door and during this time an electric lift was also installed.

No. 37 was the Dartmouth family home until the outbreak of war in 1914, when the house was used by the Red Cross as a military hospital, under the supervision of Lady Lytton. Wall coverings and fireplaces were sealed up for protection. Sold in 1918, the house was occupied briefly by the Hon. Mrs Robert Lindsay from 1923 until purchased by the ESU on 24th June 1926, for the sum of £45,000.



THE ESU AT DARTMOUTH HOUSE

OPENING OF DARTMOUTH HOUSE AS ESU HEADQUARTERS

On December 1 1926, the ESU offices were moved from No. 1 Charing Cross Road to Dartmouth House and staff took up their duties in the 83 rooms, including 38 members' bedrooms. In order not to close the house "for the usual month of spring cleaning", and to keep domestic staff to a minimum, modern conveniences were installed – a high power suction vacuum cleaning system and hot and cold water in each bedroom. The original estimate of £6,670 to kit out the house with everything from kitchen utensils to livery for the doorman was found to be woefully inadequate. Donations were sought to raise the extra funding and members responded from around the world. Bedrooms were named and furnished after a different period – the Queen Elizabeth Room housed an oak chest from the Tudor period; the John Bunyan Room held an original Bible box and Queen Mary donated an overmantel for the room that was given her name. A congratulatory letter arrived from the Editor of The Forum in New York, also enquiring "I understand that Dartmouth House is in the district of haunted houses...". There have been several reported sightings of a lady on the staircase.

Mr St Loe Strachey, editor of The Spectator and ESU Vice Chairman recommended his son-in-law, Clough Williams Ellis (of Portmeirion fame) as a young architect capable of the transforming a rather neglected and outmoded Victorian house into the busy headquarters of the English-Speaking Union. Although no major structural alterations took place, a ground floor panelled room was turned into the Walter Hines Page Memorial Library and restaurants, bedrooms and sitting rooms were created.

Dartmouth House, as it now became known, was opened by the Prime Minister, Sir Stanley Baldwin, on 22 February 1927. Lord Balfour and Lord Reading were also present made speeches and the American Ambassador and several High Commissioners attended.

PRE-WORLD WAR II

During the 1920s and 30s, rooms were available for members and Dartmouth House became a welcoming "home from home". Travelling scholars, selected for the ESU's new schoolboy and teachers scholarships have fond memories of meeting up at Dartmouth House, before embarking on their Atlantic crossings to America. The house was also a popular venue for lectures, parties, concerts and dances, often open to non-members.

DARTMOUTH HOUSE'S SPECIAL ROLE DURING WORLD WAR II

On the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the house was on the verge of closure as members left London for the country. However, due to an inspirational idea from the ESU's founder Sir Evelyn Wrench, the house took up its new and possibly most significant role to date. Dartmouth House became the headquarters of a large scale war relief programme organising and distributing clothing, toys, blankets, ambulances, mobile canteens and binoculars throughout Britain to British servicemen, Home Guard, the Red Cross, WVS and British families.





By 1942 the house had also become a "home from home" to American and Commonwealth service personnel, providing one of the busiest information bureaux in London. VIP visitors to the house included the Queen, Mrs Roosevelt, Mrs Churchill, and numerous MPs and foreign diplomats.

POST WORLD WAR II AND FURTHER CONVERSIONS

Fortunately, Dartmouth House was not damaged during the war but years of use were beginning to show and the upkeep of a large house was a strain on ESU resources. In the 1940s and 1950s, the ESU had expanded into other Charles Street properties including No. 36 and Concord House. Concord House was sold in the 1970s and No. 36 was turned into the Chesterfield Hotel. The building of the hotel necessitated the removal of number of Dartmouth House rooms and the loss of the second and third floor members' bedrooms, which became part of the hotel.

Since the 1970s the major alterations have included the modernisation of the basement areas which house the kitchen, the creation of meeting rooms and new toilet facilities and the conversion of a room in the mews house into a new library. The structure and fittings of the ground and first floor rooms are virtually unchanged since Lord Dartmouth's occupation.

WHAT IS LEFT OF LORD REVELSTOKE'S ORIGINAL HOUSE?

Today one can see the work of designer Allwright, in the wood panelled outer and inner reception halls (knocked into one hallway in the 1960s), the marble staircase hall, the Wedgwood Room and the Ballroom (now known as the Churchill Room) faced with walnut panels.


The Dining Room re-named the Revelstoke Room, has few original features from Lord Revelstoke's days apart from the 18th century fireplace which is a made of coloured marble.

Unfortunately, a first floor room believed to be the work of Grinling Gibbons and reputed to have come from a home owned by Nell Gwynne was sold in 1970, during the conversion of the Chesterfield Hotel next door.

CURRENT PAINTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

The current furnishings are of little historical interest and have been donated or bought over the years. The house does have some rather fine paintings including some portraits in the current Revelstoke Room by Margaret Lindsay Williams and J. Hudson and landscapes in the Long Drawing Room by S.H. Baker, Sir Alfred East, Edward Reginald Frampton and Benjamin West. The portrait of Sir Winston Churchill by John Wilson Jowsey which hangs on the staircase, was loaned to the ESU by Churchill College, Cambridge to coincide with the inauguration of the Churchill Room in 2003.

The building is now Grade II* (a building of national importance) and is mentioned in many London guidebooks for its façade.



DARTMOUTH HOUSE

THE INCLUSIVE CARING UNION
37

37

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The English-Speaking Union

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