

= Humphrey (cat) =

Humphrey (c . 1988 ? March 2006) was a cat employed as the Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office at 10 Downing Street , the official residence of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom , from October 1989 to 13 November 1997 . Arriving as a one @-@ year @-@ old stray , he served under the premierships of Margaret Thatcher , John Major and Tony Blair , retiring 6 months after the Blairs moved into Downing Street . He was the successor to Wilberforce . He was frequently referred to in jest by the press as an actual employee at Number 10 .

= = Start of employment = =

Humphrey was found as a stray by a Cabinet Office civil servant and named in honour of Sir Humphrey Appleby , the archetypal civil servant of Yes Minister and Yes , Prime Minister . After the death of the previous mouser , Wilberforce , in 1988 the Cabinet Office and Number 10 were in need of a replacement and so Humphrey began his work .

At a cost of about £ 100 a year (paid for from the Cabinet Office 's budget) , most of which went towards food , Humphrey was said to be of considerably better value than the Cabinet 's professional pest controller , who charged £ 4 @,@ 000 a year and is reported to have never caught a mouse . Frequently pictured posing by the famous Number 10 front door , Humphrey 's primary duties involved catching mice and rats in the maze of Downing Street buildings . The poor quality of the buildings , some of which date from the 16th century , and the nearby St. James 's Park ensure a continuous vermin problem . By the time of his retirement , Humphrey had risen to the position of Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office .

= = Humphrey 's problems = =

In November 1993 , an internal memo was circulated in the Cabinet Office informing staff that Humphrey was suffering from a minor kidney complaint and had been put on a special diet . A ban on feeding him treats was instituted .

Humphrey was accused on 7 June 1994 , of having killed four robin chicks , which were nesting in a window box outside the office of John Major , then Prime Minister . However , Major exonerated him the next day , declaring , " I am afraid Humphrey has been falsely accused . " It was not until 2006 that he was finally cleared : journalist George Jones of The Daily Telegraph admitted that his piece in the paper 's diary column had been no more than " journalistic licence " printed with no supporting evidence . In September 1994 Humphrey was found in St. James 's Park and was blamed for having " savaged " a duck there , earlier in the year .

= = Goes missing = =

In June 1995 , Humphrey went missing . Downing Street did not disclose the fact until it was mentioned to Sheila Gunn , a journalist on The Times , after Gunn told a member of staff that her own cat had died . Gunn 's story was mentioned on the front page . The publicity led to his rediscovery in the nearby Royal Army Medical College , where he had been taken in as a presumed stray and renamed PC , short for " patrol cat " . Upon his return , Humphrey issued a statement through the civil service stating , " I have had a wonderful holiday at the Royal Army Medical College , but it is nice to be back and I am looking forward to the new parliamentary session . "

= = Humphrey and the Blairs = =

Within a week of Tony Blair moving to 10 Downing Street after the May 1997 general election , press reports of a rift between Humphrey and Cherie Blair , the new Prime Minister 's wife , emerged . Mrs Blair was reported to either be allergic to cats or to believe them to be unhygienic . Sheila Gunn , who had gone on to be John Major 's press advisor , later admitted that she was the source

of these reports which her obituary says were based " on a hunch for which she had no evidence " .

At the time , a spokesperson insisted that Humphrey would not be moving out , stating that Number 10 " is Humphrey 's home and , as far as the Blairs are concerned , it will remain his home " . A photo of Humphrey and Mrs Blair was released , though this did little to allay fears that he would be forced out . Allegations were later made that Humphrey was sedated by press secretary Alastair Campbell before undergoing the ordeal . The photo was used on the cover of Private Eye with Humphrey stating ' I am going to hit the mouse running ' a paraphrase of a New Labour @-@ ism .

In November 1997 , Humphrey 's primary carer , Jonathan Rees , who worked in the Prime Minister 's Policy Unit , wrote a memo stating that the cat should retire to a " stable home environment where he can be looked after properly " . While his continuing kidney problems were given as the reason for his retirement , many believed that Mrs Blair was behind the decision .

= = Rumours of murder = =

Humphrey moved to his new home with an elderly couple in suburban London on 13 November 1997 , though his retirement was not announced until the next day to reduce the risk of kidnap attempts . The Conservatives were quick to point out that Humphrey lived happily at Number 10 for almost eight years under a Conservative government but moved out within six months of Labour taking power .

Conservative MP and animal lover Alan Clark was suspicious about the way Humphrey 's retirement was announced and demanded proof that the cat was still alive : " Humphrey is now a missing person . Unless I hear from him or he makes a public appearance , I suspect he has been shot . " This led to rumours that Humphrey had been put down on the orders of Mrs Blair .

The Prime Minister 's office insisted that veterinary advice was behind the decision to remove Humphrey from Downing Street , and on 24 November 1997 a group of journalists was taken to a secret location in south London and shown that Humphrey was still alive and well . Pictures of the cat posing with copies of the day 's newspapers were published and reports indicated that he had put on weight .

= = In retirement = =

Little was heard about Humphrey over the next few years , leading many to infer that he had died . The Daily Telegraph made a Freedom of Information Act request for documents relating to him in early 2005 , which led to more information about his time at Downing Street coming to light . In its March 2005 report about Humphrey , the Telegraph lamented " Where Humphrey is now ? or even whether he is still with us ? remains a mystery . ' I am not having much luck , ' a Cabinet Office spokesman confessed last night . His official minder has not heard from him in seven years . " However , on 22 July 2005 , The Independent reported that " the 17 @-@ year @-@ old mouser is alive and well and living in south London . " No further details were given in the text , which was part of a larger feature about celebrity pets .

In March 2006 , a spokesman for Tony Blair reported that Humphrey had died during the previous week , at the home of the Cabinet Office worker who had been accommodating him .

= = Successor = =

In September 2007 , the first Downing Street cat since Humphrey was introduced ; Sybil moved from Edinburgh with Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling and family . She shared a thespian name like her predecessor , being named after Sybil Fawltly from Fawltly Towers . Sybil returned to Edinburgh in early 2009 as she did not settle . Sybil died in July 2009 .

In February 2011 , a new cat was welcomed into Downing Street from London 's Battersea Dogs and Cats Home . Larry arrived following weeks of speculation about potential pest control measures after a large black rat was seen scuttling past No 10 .