John Major 1990-97 Conservative

Born: 29 March 1943 in St. Helier, Carshalton, Surrey

First entered Parliament: 3 May 1979

Age he became PM: 47 years, 245 days

Maiden Speech: 13 June 1979 during the debate on the new Government's Budget

Total time as PM: Six years, 154 days

Facts and figures

Education: Rutlish Grammar School, Wimbledon

Family: John Major is the fourth son of four children. He is married to Norma Elizabeth Johnson, and has one son and one daughter

Interests: Cricket, football, theatre, music, reading

Biography

Humble background

Although born in the Worcester Park area of Sutton, Major grew up in the much poorer Brixton where the family were forced to move after the failure of his father's business.

Major left school at 16, largely due to his family needing the income he could earn. He continued studying at home to qualify as a banker. In the interim, he took whatever jobs were available, working as a labourer, insurance broking clerk, and even made garden ornaments with his brother.

His political career began as a Conservative councillor in the London borough of Lambeth, and continued when he won the constituency of Huntingdon for the Conservatives in 1979, at the election which brought his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, to power.

He joined the Cabinet in 1987 as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. In the summer of 1989 John Major became Foreign Secretary after Geoffrey Howe was moved from the Foreign Office to become Leader of the House of Commons and Deputy Prime Minister. Major became Chancellor of the Exchequer less than 100 days later when Nigel Lawson dramatically resigned.

It was during Major's tenure at the Treasury that Britain joined the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in October 1990.

Thatcher's leadership at this time was under increasing pressure, and when she was challenged, John Major supported her in the leadership election of November 1990.

When she stepped down, Major entered the contest himself, and with Thatcher's support he went on to beat Michael Heseltine and Douglas Hurd. Major appointed both colleagues to his new Cabinet. When elected, he was the youngest Prime Minister for over a century.