

## Royal Horseguards Hotel History

- Victoria Embankment, the grime below the beauty

The Thames river was terribly polluted 150 years ago. Even members of Parliament could not conduct their daily meetings because the smell from the river was so bad. Something had to be done. A commission was assembled to tackle the issue by creating modern sewage system for London. That is how an elegant embankment in the Parisian style along the river on top of the sewer was built. That today is Victoria Embankment.

- The Building

The original idea behind the building was the first American hotel for Americans. Unfortunately, in 1883, it became obvious that the American syndicate had great ideas, but no money. At the end the decision was taken to build luxury apartments and share the site with the National Liberal Club (Northern end of the development). Victorians were the most exuberant builders, in love with colour and ornament. Everything was constructed on the fabulous scale. The building was one of the first in London to have electricity; air flow system and water operated lifts.

- Secret Services

UK Secret services previously have been founded on the 8th floor of the hotel. Sir Mansfield

Cumming was a founding father and the first head of Britain's secret intelligence service, MI6. He was an extraordinary figure who carried a swordstick, wore a gold-rimmed monocle and was reputed to have cut off his own leg with a penknife after a serious car accident in France (only a legend to test new MI6 recruits)

Sir Cumming wrote in green ink and always signed his correspondence C – habits continued by his successors in MI6 until nowadays (remember James Bond and his Boss M, tradition borrowed by Ian Fleming, James Bond creator).

This is why The Royal Horseguards signature pen is green with green ink. In March 2015, the English Heritage in honour of Sir Mansfield Cumming unveiled a blue plaque on the side of the hotel.

- Restaurant and the Division Bell Our hotel's restaurant is called One Twenty-One Two (1212). The name has been chosen as this is a famous telephone number of Scotland Yard. It was introduced in 1934 and was used by the public to contact the

London Metropolitan Police. Due to the hotel's immediate neighbourhood to Parliament, we do have a 'Division Bell' installed in 1212 restaurant.

A division bell is a bell rung in or around a parliament to signal to all members of the chamber to go and place their vote. Once the bell rings, members of the House of Commons or the House of Lords have eight minutes to get to their chosen Division Lobby to vote for or against the resolution.

- National Liberal Club (NLC)

National Liberal Club has been created for the senior members and supporters of the most successful political party in the country at the time. The days of mighty Liberals are now almost forgotten. However, it is worth mentioning that from 1852 - 1918 the party was in power for 43 years out of 66. It could point to leaders as great as Prime Minister William Gladstone and in much later years Sir Winston Churchill joined the club and was one of the most famous members for over 18 years.

- Cellar

The original building foundation stone laid by the Prime Minister himself, William Gladstone, in 1884 can still be found in the hotels cellar. The Cellar holds more secrets legend about Winston Churchill's tunnel more in the section War and Churchill) and the original fuse box. The story goes that the owner of the company who installed the fuse box and brought electricity to the building later travelled on Titanic, perhaps the most famous ship ever and tragically perished together with 1517 souls to the bottom of the ocean when the ship hit the iceberg in 1912.

However, the original purpose for the Cellar was always to store drinks; even these days a small section of the cellar is still used to store hotel drinks supplies.

- Great World Wars and Sir Winston Churchill

During the First and Second World Wars, different government institutions commandeered the building. During the Second World War most of Whitehall Court was requisitioned by the government and the Russian Embassy was located on the 5th floor, the American Embassy on the 6th floor and the Air Training Corps on the 7th. The building was bombed during the Second world, but was extremely fortunate as only one faulty bomb hit the building.

There is a story that Winston Churchill had a secret passage way to and from the National Liberal Club to the buildings next door. Today, if you go to the far end of the NLC Cellar you can still find the staircase leading to nowhere. We note that there is

an old lift shaft behind, but we do not know if it used to lead anywhere. Something we know for sure is that during the War, London had many tunnels connecting important buildings; some of them were used only for telephone lines but records show that there were secret passage ways all over London as well.

- Grand staircase and Gladstone Library

You had to be very lucky not to sustain bomb damage during the Blitz and the NLC was fortunate that only one small bomb hit it and it happened to be faulty. This came through the skylight above the grand staircase in NLC and wrecked the two top flights of the staircase. The third flight collapsed under the weight of the debris but the rest of the building withstood the explosion. It says much for the quality of the original construction that this was the result. The staircase was rebuilt and is now the largest free standing Marble staircase in Europe.

The Gladstone Library then opened in 1888 was the most extensive (20,000 volume) Club library in London. It was a monument to their famous Prime Minister William Gladstone. Funnily enough, currently the library doesn't hold any real books just very carefully made copies. The original books have been donated to Bristol University and replicas have been made in their place. The copies were put in exactly the same order as they were found.

#### Location/ Landmarks

- Centrally located upon Victoria Embankment in the heart of Theatre land
- Transport connections, within walking distance of Charing Cross, Embankment, Waterloo, Westminster stations.
- Walking distance to London Eye, Big Ben, Horseguards Parade, Trafalgar Square, Covent Garden, Houses of Parliament and many more

#### History (see page 4)

- Grade 2 historical building
- Designed by Alfred Waterhouse
- Famous residents include William Gladstone, Lord Kitchener, Grand Duke Michael of Russia and Bernard Shaw

- UK Secret services previously have been founded on the 8th floor of the hotel. Sir Mansfield Cumming was a founding father and the first head of Britain's secret intelligence service, MI6. Sir Mansfield Cumming was using green ink pen to sign documents. As amenities in the hotel we have green pens with green ink to give to our guests.
- Our hotel's restaurant is called One Twenty-One Two (1212). The name has been chosen as this is a famous telephone number of Scotland Yard. It was introduced in 1934 and was used by the public to contact the London Metropolitan Police.
- National Liberal Club has been created for the senior members and supporters of the most successful political party in the country at the time.
- The original building foundation stone laid by the Prime Minister himself, William Gladstone, in 1884 can still be found in the hotels cellar. The Cellar holds more secrets legend about Winston Churchill's tunnel
- During the Second World War most of Whitehall Court was requisitioned by the government and the Russian Embassy was located on the 5th floor, the American Embassy on the 6th floor and the Air Training Corps on the 7th.
- There is a story that Winston Churchill had a secret passage way to and from the National Liberal Club to the buildings next door.
- The Gladstone Library then opened in 1888 was the most extensive (20,000 volume) Club library in London.