

Palmerston & Politics

Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston was born at the stately home, Broadlands, in Hampshire on 29th October 1784. He went on to dominate English politics from the time of the Crimean War until his death in 1865.

As an Irish peer, Palmerston was eligible to sit in the English House of Commons, but he also had several connections with the South of England. At the age of 22 he paid £1500 to become MP for Horsham but complaints were made about this and the following year it was arranged for him to become MP for Newport on the Isle of Wight. He held this position until 1811. While the greater part of his career saw him as MP for Tiverton, he also briefly represented Hampshire South from 1832 to 1834.

The Temple family's principal residence was its country house at Broadlands, close to Romsey in Hampshire. Palmerston grew up there. This was where he spent his holidays from school at Harrow and vacations from university life at Edinburgh and Cambridge.



Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston



Palmerston addressing the House of Commons

In his early years in politics, Palmerston was associated with the Tory Party. He was a junior minister in Lord Liverpool's government, serving as Secretary for War from 1809 until 1828. In 1830 he joined the Whig government of Lord Grey and for the first time was a cabinet minister. As Grey's Foreign Secretary, Palmerston became known for his aggressive promotion and defence of British interests.

At the Foreign Office, Palmerston oversaw the opening up of China to British traders and the Opium War of 1839 to 1842 resulted in Britain gaining possession of Hong Kong.

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The Don Pacifico Incident was a classic example of Palmerston's 'gunboat diplomacy'. In 1847, a British merchant operating in Greece called Don Pacifico had his property vandalised. Complaining to the Greek authorities got him nowhere so he appealed to the British government for help. In 1850 Palmerston sent the Royal Navy steaming into the main Greek ports. The ports were blockaded for two months and several Greek Navy vessels were seized by the British. Eventually the Greek government compensated Pacifico but not before the incident had caused trouble with France and Russia.

When challenged by his political opponents about this heavy-handed use of British naval power, Palmerston responded that a British subject would be protected 'in whatever land he may be'. Just as citizens of ancient Rome could declare 'civis romanus sum' (I am a Roman citizen) so could a British citizen say 'civis britannicus sum'.

Although Palmerston later became Home Secretary in Lord Aberdeen's government he remained closely linked to foreign affairs. When the Aberdeen government broke up under the pressure of the initially difficult phase of the Crimean War, Palmerston was the obvious choice to bring the war to a successful conclusion.



Napoleon III

He became Prime Minister for the first time in 1855 but this wasn't the end of his difficulties. He lost office in 1858 when he couldn't persuade Parliament to pass the Conspiracy to Murder Bill. After a plot to kill the French Emperor, Napoleon III, had been foiled, Palmerston was persuaded to introduce a law preventing murders being planned in Britain. This did not play well in Parliament and people saw this as evidence that he was going soft on the French.

By 1859 he was back in office as the Liberal Prime Minister and remained the dominant figure in British politics until his death in 1865.

Palmerston is still remembered as a strong leader and will always be associated with his energetic defence of British interests around the globe. Indeed, it was Palmerston's government which commissioned the *Warrior* and the first generation of iron warships. When the French began to catch up in naval technology it was Palmerston who personally insisted on building massive and, with hindsight, unnecessary fortifications around Britain's naval bases. To this day the huge chain of forts overlooking Portsmouth on Portsdown Hill are known as 'Palmerston's Follies'.



Palmerston, Brunel and Florence Nightingale's Field Hospital

Briefing

The Crimean War started in March 1854 and ended in 1856 and Lord Palmerston was the British Prime Minister for most of this period. Best known for the invention of the balaclava and the charge of the Light Brigade, it was fought between Russia on one hand and France, Britain and Turkey on the other.

Most of the fighting happened on the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea. Conditions were terrible and weren't helped by the incompetence of the British military leadership. Some 34,000 soldiers out of 56,000 in the Crimea died of disease and wounds in just six months between 1854 and 1855!

Florence Nightingale campaigned tirelessly to get something done about the awful conditions and eventually people started to listen. In February 1855, Isambard Kingdom Brunel was contacted by the War Office and asked to build a temporary, pre-fabricated hospital.

Brunel took time off from building the *SS Great Eastern* and in less than a month had designed a pre-fabricated timber hospital. Each part of the hospital was light enough to be carried by one or two men and the building could be put up almost anywhere by unskilled workers.

Amazingly, by Christmas 1855 the hospital had been built at a place called Renkioi on the Dardanelles and all 1000 beds were full. In its brief existence the hospital treated nearly 1400 patients and only 50 died. Compare this with the hospital at Scutari, where over 40 patients died for every 100 admitted and I know which one I would rather go to.

Your Task

Design a moveable club house where you can relax with your friends. The clubhouse needs to be sturdy but it needs to be made so that you can put it together easily and quickly. It also needs to be easy to take down and carry to a new site whenever you need to.

Sound difficult? Try designing a 1000 bed portable hospital then!

