Britpolitics Fact Sheet – Margaret Thatcher

This fact sheet tells you about the life of the first female British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. You can find lots more about the history and role of the Prime Minister at [www.britpolitics.co.uk](http://www.britpolitics.co.uk)

# Overview

Margaret Thatcher was Britain’s first female Prime Minister.

Thatcher was first elected to Parliament in 1959 and served as British Prime Minister from 1979 – 1990. Known as the ‘Iron Lady’ she was the longest serving PM for over 150 years.

# Early Years

Margaret Hilda Roberts was born on 13 October 1925, Grantham, Lincolnshire

Margaret’s father, a shopkeeper and Mayor of Grantham, was a major influence in her childhood. She was educated at the local grammar school and studied Chemistry at Oxford University, where she became president of the university Conservative association. Thatcher also read for the bar, married Denis Thatcher and had two children – twins Carol and Mark.

# Getting Elected

Thatcher was elected as the Conservative MP for Finchley in 1959. She held junior posts before becoming Shadow Spokesperson for Education, and entered the Cabinet as Education Secretary in 1970.

# Running for Leader of the Conservative Party

At this time the Conservative Party to which Margaret Thatcher belonged, was in opposition (the Labour Party was in power). Thatcher stood against Edward Heath for the party leadership in 1975 and won.

After a grueling election campaign during a time of social turmoil in Great Britain Thatcher took the Conservative Party into the 1979 General Election – and the British public gave the Conservative party enough to form a majority and therefore Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister.

# Taking over as Prime Minister

Thatcher took over from the Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan. Her first two years in office were not easy - unemployment was very high, but the economy gradually showed improvement.

She brought more of her supporters into the Cabinet, and added to her reputation by leading the country to war against Argentina in the Falkland Islands.

The Conservatives went on to win the 1983 election by an overwhelming majority, helped by a divided opposition.

Her government followed a radical programme of privatisation and deregulation, reform of the trade unions, tax cuts and the introduction of market mechanisms into health and education. The aim was to reduce the role of government and increase individual self-reliance.

She also became a familiar figure internationally, creating a famous friendship with US President Reagan and gaining the praise of Soviet leader Gorbachev.

One great difficulty during her time in office was the issue of Europe. Her long-serving Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe resigned in November 1990 in protest at her attitude to Europe. His resignation speech brought about events, which were to lead to her exit from 10 Downing Street later that month.

# Leaving Office

Michael Heseltine challenged her for the leadership, and while he failed to win, he gained 152 votes – enough to make it evident that a crucial minority favoured a change.

Thatcher was eventually persuaded not to go forward to the second ballot, which was won by her Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Major. A tearful Mrs Thatcher left Downing Street for the last time on 28 November 1990.

# Joining the House of Lords

She remained Member of Parliament for Finchley for two years but left the House of Commons in 1992. Thatcher was appointed a life peerage in the House of Lords in the same year, receiving the title of Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven.

In 1995 she was appointed by the Queen as Lady Companion of the Order of the Garter, the highest order of Chivalry in the UK.

Thatcher also devoted time to writing. This included two volumes of memoirs: The Downing Street Years and The Path to Power. In later years, as her health deteriorated, there were fewer public appearances but she did visit Gordon Brown and David Cameron at Number 10.

# Thatcher’s Death

Margaret Thatcher died on 8 April 2013 at The Ritz Hotel in London, after suffering a stroke.

Thatcher received a ceremonial funeral including full military honours, with a church service at St Paul’s Cathedral attended by the Queen. One of the chosen hymns was ‘I vow to thee my country’.

On 28 September 2013 her ashes were interred at the Royal Hospital Chelsea alongside those of her husband Sir Denis.