

# So this is what you get for £3.6m



By Sean O'Neill  
Anne Ashworth  
and Grainne Gilmore

TONY and Cherie Blair bought their new home more than a month ago but details of the transaction were kept quiet amid summer speculation about the Prime Minister's future.

The Blairs bought the five-storey house from Roger Bevan, an art collector and critic, who paid £950,000 for it ten years ago. Mr Bevan, 52, an Old Etonian and Turner Prize judge, did not know who his prospective buyers were although the Blairs are understood to have viewed the property while he was absent.

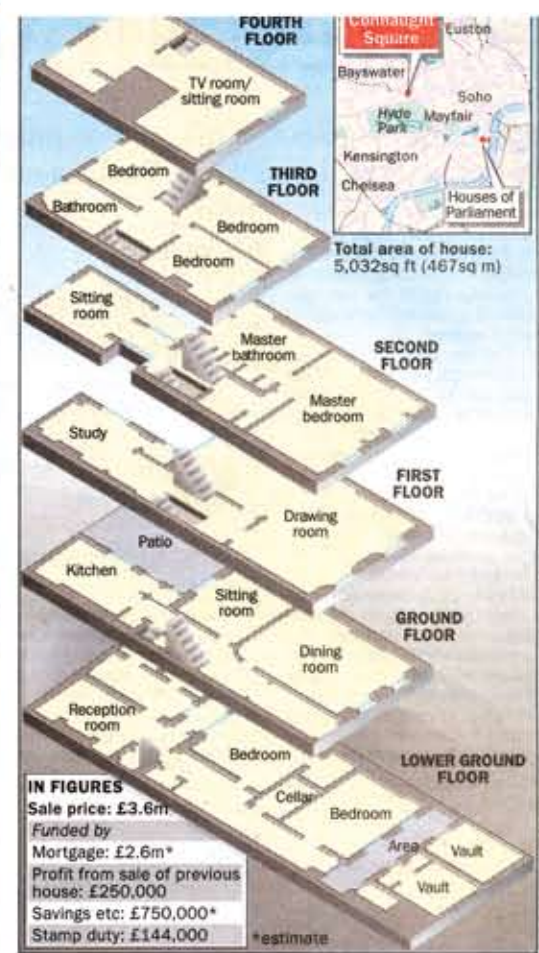
Downing Street had always intended to make details of the purchase public when the transaction was filed with the Land Registry but rumours began to circulate on Wednesday and officials were forced to confirm them.

After the "Cheriegate" fiasco, surrounding the purchase of two flats in Bristol, the family was determined that the property deal would not be tarnished.

Their current next-door neighbour, the Chancellor, will take £144,000 in stamp duty from the sale of 29 Connaught Square, and the previous owner has made a £2.65 million profit, but the Blairs have saddled themselves with a supersized mortgage.

Brokers calculated that the Blairs are likely to have taken out a £2.6 million mortgage and put down a deposit of £1 million — drawn from savings and the estimated £240,000 profit from the sale of their Islington home. The monthly mortgage payments are likely to be more than £11,300. However, few doubt Mr Blair's ability to make serious money when he steps down.

His memoirs will easily command a multi-million-pound advance. Baroness Thatcher received a £35 million advance for two instalments of



hers. The after-dinner speaking circuit also beckons, with Mr Blair likely to earn fees of \$100,000 per engagement in the United States. John Major, his predecessor, is said to earn up to £25,000 per appearance in America.

Wayne Coleman, one of the select band of London bespoke mortgage brokers who deal in very large loans, said: "Income multiples go out the window, especially if you are bringing clients such as the Blairs to a bank. The focus will be on the borrowers' assets and their future income."

The Blairs' future wealth will not make them stand out in this corner of London known as the Hyde Park Estate. The square's residents include investment bankers and lawyers. The house immediately next door is owned by Paul



Des res: the spacious interiors of 29 Connaught Square, where other residents hire private security guards at weekends



Oakenfold, the DJ whose hits include *Starry Eyed Surprise*. Like the Blairs, Mr Oakenfold lets his house. A tenant has already been found for the Blairs' five-storey house, which has a self-contained basement flat, and is expected

to pay an annual rent of more than £150,000. The Blairs are unlikely to profit from the rental. Mr Bevan and his wife Beverley had lived in Connaught Square since 1994 and carried out extensive renovations. A

neighbour said: "Roger and Beverley produced a truly beautiful interior — they've given a traditional house a quite modern feel." Before the Bevan, the house had been home to Graham and Sandra Balfour-

Lynn who paid £180,000 for a short lease in 1991. "When we moved into the property it was in a very bad state, run down and needed a lot of work," said Mrs Balfour-Lynn, 39, a yoga teacher. "It was a huge project but

one I enjoyed. It has a lot of original features that we did a lot to keep up, particularly the cornices, railings, windows and fireplaces. My bedroom, which I imagine will become Mr and Mrs Blair's bedroom, was on the second floor and had its own dressing area and a huge bathroom."

Mr Blair will not be the first distinguished former public servant to live at 29 Connaught Square; 100 years ago it was the home of retired Admiral Sir Erasmus Ommanney.

But the square has not always been kind to fallen leaders. The body of Oliver Cromwell was exhumed in 1661 after the Restoration, and symbolically hanged from a gibbet at Tyburn. The gallows are believed to have been moved from their original site

to a spot where 49 Connaught Square now stands. The presence of the place of public execution delayed the area, then known as Tyburnia, being developed as a residential area. House building began under the supervision of the Church Commissioners in the early 19th century.

Mr Hirst, 46, chairman of the local Conservative ward, said he welcomed the extra security that would accompany Mr Blair's arrival. Residents currently employ private security guards at weekends.

Those problems of inner-city living are, thankfully, offset by the annual summer garden party when residents gather in the communal gardens to drink wine, listen to jazz and eat food from a local restaurant.

## From theatrical roots to top of property ladder

By Alan Hamilton

IT'S a long way up the ladder from a nice wee £3,000 bungalow in the respectable Willowbrae district of Edinburgh to a house in Connaught Square. It's even further from a £400 three-bedroom terraced property at the scrag end of Crosby, near Liverpool.

Both Tony and Cherie Blair had theatrical roots. The Prime Minister's grandparents, whose name was Parsons, had a child while in rep in Glasgow, and gave the infant Leo for adoption to a shipyard worker's family named Blair. The boy did well and had set up home at 5 Paisley Terrace, Edinburgh, when his son Tony was born in 1953.

Cherie's parents were still treading the boards when she was born in Bury, Lancashire, in 1954. She was brought up by her grandmother Vera Booth in a house at 15 Ferndale Road, Waterloo.

When Tony was five his

father got a job as a law lecturer at Durham University, and the family moved to a flat in Providence Row. The Rev George Carey, a local vicar, was a near neighbour. He too did well.

Leo and Hazel Blair, with three young children on their hands, moved to a larger modern detached house at 28 Hill Meadows, High Shincliffe, outside the city. It was Tony's last family home; he was off to boarding school at Fettes College, Edinburgh, and then to Oxford. Cherie escaped her northern roots to the London School of Economics and eventually to a shared house in Hackney, East London.

Tony spent his first two years at Oxford living in rooms at St John's College. For his final year, he shared a house in Argyle Street.

When he graduated and moved to London in 1975, he shared a string of rented flats: a basement at 92 Ifield Road, Earls Court, followed by a flat



Ideal homes from the early years (from left): Paisley Terrace, Edinburgh; Providence Row, Durham; High Shincliffe, Durham; Ifield Road, Earls Court, West London



Upwardly mobile: Mapledene Road, Hackney, and their constituency home in Trimdon. In London they lived in Stavordale Road, Islington, Richmond Avenue, and now Connaught Square



in St Edmund Terrace, Primrose Hill, and finally a house at 41 Bramford Road, Wandsworth, where the landlord was a young Charles Falconer, now, as Lord Falconer of Thoroton, the Lord Chancellor. When Tony and Cherie

married in 1980 they bought their first property, a four-bed, three-storey terraced house at 59 Mapledene Road, Hackney, for £40,000.

By 1986 Tony, by now an MP, and his wife bought a spacious four-bedroomed

house at 10 Stavordale Road, Highbury, for around £120,000.

Apart from having to live close to the Arsenal football ground, it proved the most astute of moves.

Five years later they agreed

a house-swap with Laurence Gerlis, a Harley Street doctor, and his wife Pauline, who owned a five-bedroomed, five-storey house at 1 Richmond Crescent in Bayswater, one of the best areas of the London Borough of Islington. It cost

the Blairs their Highbury house, plus £175,000.

When Tony became Prime Minister in 1997, security considerations obliged him to put the family home on the market.

It sold for an estimated

£700,000, which even giving creeping inflation must be regarded as a healthy profit.

The Blairs have since enjoyed seven years of rent-free living in Downing Street. The only trouble is, there's no security of tenure.