

Welcome to

DARTMOUTH HOUSE

Home of the English-Speaking Union



100

ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
discovering voices | changing lives | 1918-2018

DARTMOUTH HOUSE & THE ENGLISH- SPEAKING UNION

Since 1926 Dartmouth House has been the home of the English-Speaking Union, an educational charity that equips young people with the oracy – speaking and listening – skills and confidence they need to thrive.

The English-Speaking Union was founded 100 years ago, after the devastation of World War I, out of an abiding belief in the power of communication to bolster international understanding and, ultimately, peace. Dartmouth House functioned both as its headquarters and as a meeting place and clubhouse for its members, something it continues to do today. Recognised as a charity in 1977, the English-Speaking Union now works to put oracy skills at the centre of the school curriculum. Our debating and public speaking programmes and competitions help young people to express themselves, to think for themselves, and to consider other people's point of view. In short, we give children a voice, and help them to be heard.

Find out more about our history and what we do at 100.esu.org.



Lord Dartmouth's staff in the courtyard of Dartmouth House in 1900

A RICH HERITAGE

What is now known as Dartmouth House is actually two houses: nos. 37 and 38 Charles Street. Both were built in around 1755, when Berkeley Square was the haunt of violent thieves and when the open Tybourne brook at its south end was so evil-smelling that it was described at the time as 'a common sewer'.

The two buildings were combined between 1890 and 1891 by banker Edward Baring, who had been raised to the peerage as Baron Revelstoke in 1885. One of the most conspicuous consumers of the decade, he wanted a home equal to his vast collection of French antique furniture and art, and he employed builders William Cubitt & Co and the firm of William Turner Lord for the interior design. The Barings Bank crisis of the 1890s (which necessitated a Bank of England bail-out and led to Lord Revelstoke's bankruptcy) drew the works to a sharp halt.

The next owner, conservative politician Lord Dartmouth, carried out further improvements to the house, creating the Long and Small Drawing Rooms on the first floor out of what had been three reception rooms, and inscribing his name on the Doric porch outside in 1900.

The English-Speaking Union (ESU) bought Dartmouth House in 1926, and Clough Williams Ellis (of Portmeirion fame), was brought in to transform what was by then a somewhat outmoded house into the organisation's headquarters and a 'home from home' for its growing membership. When Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin officially opened the house in February 1927, it had 83 rooms, including 38 bedrooms for members (American ESU members donated money for the fixtures and fittings), 26 with their own bathroom. Appropriately, given our name, all rooms had their own telephone. Other rooms included a wood-panelled library, two restaurants, a drawing room, a ladies' private drawing room, a ballroom, a tea room, a reading and writing room, and a travel bureau

One of the 'Blitz trucks' donated by the American ESU to deliver aid in World War II



through which steamship and railway tickets and theatre and concert tickets could be booked. The house was a popular venue for lectures, parties, concerts and dances, many of which were open to non-members.

The house had served as a military hospital for the British Red Cross in World War I. In World War II during the Blitz, the English-Speaking Union set up a department here to distribute US donations to the areas of greatest need. By 1942 it focused on offering talks, visits and dances to entertain the thousands of American troops in Britain.

Today, the English-Speaking Union has use of only the basement, ground and first floors – the upper stories are now leased to the Chesterfield Hotel next door. Many of the heats of our competitions such as the Schools' Mace debating competition and the ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition take place in the splendid first-floor rooms. These rooms, and indeed the whole house, are available to hire for weddings, private dining functions and events. Over thirty percent of all proceeds from Dartmouth House events go towards supporting the English-Speaking Union in its charitable work, equipping young people with the oracy skills and confidence they need to reach their full potential.



Baron Revelstoke, one of the most conspicuous consumers of the decade, wanted a home equal to his vast collection of French antique furniture and art

EXTERIOR

Standing outside, you can see from its size that Dartmouth House used to consist of two houses: nos. 37 and 38 Charles Street. While the other houses in the street are brick, Dartmouth House is faced in stone and decorated with exuberant mouldings – the work of building firm William Cubitt & Co which combined the two houses into one magnificent residence for Edward Baring, Lord Revelstoke, between 1890 and 1891. The marble courtyard and stylish mews house at the rear were also added at this time; as was the central Doric porch (with its polished granite columns reputed to be from St Petersburg), created as the entrance to the enlarged house. Revelstoke paid over £26,000 to Cubitt & Co. The rococo wrought-iron railings alone cost £6,000 – look for the stylised ‘R’ for Revelstoke in the design.

Lord Revelstoke’s eighth child, Maurice Baring (1874-1945), wrote of his memories of the nursery, which was on the third floor of the house overlooking the street.

‘I can remember the peculiar roar of London in those days; the four-wheelers and hansoms rattling on the macadam pavement through the fog, except when there was straw down in the street for some sick person; and the various denizens of the streets, the lamplighter and the muffin-man; often a barrel-organ, constantly in summer a band, and sometimes a Punch and Judy.’ (*The Puppet Show of Memory*)

The 6th Earl of Dartmouth, conservative politician William Heneage Legge, was the next owner of the house and it was he who named it, carving his moniker onto the portico.

Dartmouth House was described in *The Illustrated London News* in 1970 as ‘by far the grandest building in Charles street’. It is Grade II*-listed (a building of national importance) and is included in Simon Jenkins’ *England’s Thousand Best Houses*.

The Doric porch bearing Lord Dartmouth’s name





The entrance hallway of Dartmouth House today

ENTRANCE HALLWAY

The front and rear reception halls are the work of interior decorators William Turner Lord for Lord Revelstoke when nos. 37 and 38 were combined in the early 1890s. The wood panelling to the rear was installed at this time, while the white panelling at the front is a later copy in plaster. Unfortunately, a damaged section of wood panelling was chosen from which to make the master – if you look closely you'll see that each of the plaster panels is missing a decorative moulding.

The bust on the left of the room is of Sir Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister and Chairman of the English-Speaking Union from 1921-1925. You can see his name, along with those of our other chairmen and presidents, on the board to the left of the door to the courtyard. Note also the pink marble fireplace and its carving of Hestia, Greek goddess of the hearth.



Sir Winston Churchill,
former Prime Minister,
was Chairman of
the English-Speaking
Union from 1921-1925



The Wedgwood Room features panels painted by Pierre-Victor Galland

WEDGWOOD ROOM

This room has only ever been three colours. In Lord Revelstoke's time, William Turner Lord painted it in gold, commissioning the acclaimed muralist Pierre-Victor Galland to add the panels on the themes of literature, travel, astronomy, music and art; and embellishing the walls with elaborate stucco work incorporating their patron's initials (EB – Edward Baring).

During World War II, the room was painted pink and it was here where Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States, took tea with the American troops who then frequented Dartmouth House when she visited England in October 1942.

Since the 1990s, it has been blue and now serves as the restaurant. The display cases on the rear wall house three mace – decorated staffs – awarded to winners of our debating competitions.



In October 1942, Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States, took tea with American troops in the Wedgwood Room at Dartmouth House



REVELSTOKE ROOM

Today a drawing room for members of the English-Speaking Union, this has few original features from Lord Revelstoke's days apart from the eighteenth-century Italian fireplace inlaid with coral and lapis lazuli. Note too the portraits of Evelyn Wrench, the ESU's founder (by the door), and American diplomat Walter Hines Page (seen here), after whom one of our scholarships is named.



The marble courtyard and grand mews house

MARBLE COURTYARD & MEWS HOUSE

Lord Revelstoke was also responsible for installing this courtyard and the unusually grand mews house behind. Originally this housed the stable block and the kitchens for the house (five chefs – and around 45 other staff – worked here for Lord Dartmouth in c.1900). In World War II these rooms became the headquarters of the English-Speaking Union's war relief programme which organised and distributed clothing, toys, blankets – even ambulances and mobile canteens – many of them donated by its American members, to British servicemen, charities and families. Today the mews is home to the offices of the English-Speaking Union.

Looking up at the main house from the courtyard it is possible to see the original brickwork, and the stonework added later by Lord Revelstoke.



In World War II,
the mews house
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BAR

Lord Revelstoke's London home was an amalgamation of styles, so expertly designed by William Allwright, William Turner Lord's designer, that it is often difficult to identify what is old and new. This room, like several others in the house, is clad in very high-quality French mid-eighteenth-century panelling thought to have come from Parisian hotels and then cleaned, re-gilded and cut to size.

In 1926, when the English-Speaking Union bought Dartmouth House, architect Clough Williams-Ellis turned this room into a library

of British-American literature. It was named in honour of Walter Hines Page, United States Ambassador to the UK during World War I who, like his friend Sir Evelyn Wrench, the founder of the ESU, was a firm believer in the importance of Anglo-American relations. In the 1930s, the library was moved and the space became a card room. There is a portrait of Walter Hines Page in the Revelstoke Room (see page 7) and since 1923 we have run a scholarship programme named in his honour, allowing teachers to undertake research in the US.

The bar with its fine French eighteenth-century wood panelling



STAIRCASE HALL

Perhaps Lord Revelstoke's most flamboyant intervention was this elaborate full-height staircase hall, constructed in 1890 and lined with Belgian marble. The rococo balustrade incorporates Revelstoke's monogram and took a father-and-son-team two years to make. The ceiling painting is by Pierre-Victor Galland (1822-1892) who was also responsible for the painted panels in the Wedgwood Room.

In World War I the then owner, the Earl of Dartmouth, returned to his country home and the house was used as a military hospital by the British Red Cross. It is reported that officers' beds were moved to the space under the stairs (the strongest part of the house) during the Zeppelin raids, so it is ironic that when Prime Minister Sir Stanley Baldwin

opened Dartmouth House for the English-Speaking Union on 22 February 1927, there were concerns about whether the staircase would bear the weight of the crowd. (It did and is entirely safe).

Pictures of Her Majesty The Queen, Patron of the English-Speaking Union, and Prince Philip; and Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, President of the ESU, hang at the bottom of the stairs. The portrait of Sir Winston Churchill by John Wilson Jowsey which hangs on the staircase was loaned to the ESU by Churchill College, Cambridge, to coincide with the inauguration of the Churchill Room in 2003. Note too the private postbox, installed in 1926 by arrangement with the postmaster-general and still in use today.

The imposing marble staircase at Dartmouth House



Note the private postbox in the staircase hall, installed in 1926 by arrangement with the postmaster-general and still in use today



The Robert Adam fireplace, located in the Long Drawing Room



During World War I, Dartmouth House was used as a military hospital

LONG AND SMALL DRAWING ROOMS

Lord Dartmouth placed his stamp on the house in 1900 when he created the Long and Small Drawing Rooms from what had been three smaller rooms. These rooms have ornate ceilings incorporating the crest of the Dartmouth Family and the year of their decoration.

The fine Robert Adam fireplace in the Long Drawing Room was installed earlier by Lord Revelstoke and was originally at Derby House, Grosvenor Square. The original watercolours can be seen at Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's inn Fields. The French eighteenth-century painted doors between the two rooms also date to Lord Revelstoke's time.

Landscapes in the Long Drawing Room include works by S.H. Baker, Sir Alfred East, and the charming *Love and the West Wind* by Edward Reginald Frampton, last publically on display at the Royal Academy in 1921.

The English-Speaking Union was unusual for its time in that it has welcomed women as members since its foundation in 1918. The Small Drawing Room, featuring dado panelling from c.1740 and a handsome French marble fireplace was originally the ladies' private sitting room, and was decorated with a striped green silk tapestry. During World War I this room was used as St George's Ward of the military hospital operated here by the British Red Cross.

Today both rooms, along with the Churchill Room next door, are used to host the heats and finals for some of our speaking and debate competitions for primary and secondary school students. They also serve as function rooms for private events, weddings, conferences and filming (*Sherlock*, *Mr Selfridge* and *House of Cards* all have scenes shot in the house), with over 30 per cent of proceeds going towards funding our educational programmes in areas of social need.

CHURCHILL ROOM

The panelling in this, the former ballroom, again installed by Lord Revelstoke in the early 1890s, was once thought to be walnut but is in fact oak. Traces of gilding can still be seen in parts. The room is named after our former Chairman, Winston Churchill, who once said 'If you can speak in this country, you can do anything'. Look out for the delightful lion's head doorknobs, also part of Lord Revelstoke's furnishings.



OUR MISSION

The English-Speaking Union believes every child should be able to make their voice heard. We believe that the ability to progress and to thrive in life relies on oracy – speaking and listening – skills, skills which are not currently a prominent part of the state school curriculum. Our debate and public speaking programmes help young people to engage with complex ideas, to speak more confidently, to formulate and organise their ideas more effectively and, just as importantly, to listen. These skills improve young people’s attainment, self-esteem and social skills, helping them to achieve

their goals and to change their lives and communities for the better.

Oracy skills can open the door to careers in the professions – law, politics, journalism and more – indeed, it’s hard to think of any career today that does not require them. And yet it is a well-documented fact that those young people most in need of these skills are least likely to receive suitable training, due to their backgrounds or geography. The English-Speaking Union works to redress this imbalance and aims to ensure that young people everywhere have the opportunity to discover their voices and reach their full potential.



HOW THE ESU HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Education – Just as numeracy and literacy are learnt, so oracy must be taught and, crucially, practised for us to be proficient. Our debating and public speaking workshops and curricula help young people to think about important issues from all angles, and to convey their thoughts confidently and articulately.

Competition – Our competitions build confidence and raise aspirations, teaching students how to deal with constructive criticism and broadening their circle of friends and contacts.

Cultural exchange – Our cultural exchanges give young people a wider world view, promoting international understanding and opening their eyes to possibilities and opportunities they may never have dreamed of before.



If you teach kids to debate you give them a chance to have their voice heard, and you give them the power not to be ignored

TOMMY SEAGULL
PUPIL BARRISTER & ESU ALUMNUS

YOUR DONATION CHANGES LIVES

Do you believe in the power of communication? Do you believe that all young people, regardless of the school they go to, should have the chance to learn how to express themselves effectively? Do you believe in the global exchange of ideas; that the better we can communicate, the easier it will be to resolve differences? Perhaps you've participated in an English-Speaking Union programme or exchange and would like to ensure others have the same opportunities as you? Or perhaps you're only too aware that reading and writing will only get you so far, it's being able to talk that opens doors.

Whatever your motivation, donating to the English-Speaking Union will help us to address imbalances in opportunity and ensure that many more young people have the oracy skills and confidence they need to thrive.

HERE'S WHAT YOUR DONATION COULD PROVIDE:

£30 will fund a school to take part in the ESU-Churchill National Public Speaking Competition, boosting young people's confidence and oracy skills

£100 will fund a partial bursary for a young person to attend Debate Academy, giving them the chance to engage with and discuss world affairs

£600 will fund a Discover Your Voice session at a school, helping up to 30 children feel that their voices matter

Please give generously today.

You'll find a donation box on the reception desk, or please visit 100.esu.org.

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Registered charity number: 273136; esu.org



DARTMOUTH HOUSE

HOLD YOUR EVENT AT DARTMOUTH HOUSE

Dartmouth House, home of educational charity the English-Speaking Union, is an elegant mansion set in the heart of London's Mayfair. With its stunning classical interiors and original features, the house is the perfect venue for elegant private dining functions, awards dinners and weddings, as well as conferences, board meetings, seminars and lectures.

Over 30 per cent of proceeds go to the English-Speaking Union's education programmes, so by holding an event

at Dartmouth House, you are helping ensure that all children, regardless of their background or education, have the oracy (speaking and listening) skills they need to reach their full potential.

The house can accommodate groups as small as 10 people, and up to 450 for a standing drinks reception.

To find out more, speak to our events team on 020 7529 1554 or email info@dartmouthhouse.co.uk quoting 'Open House'.



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