

Benn Performs Unprecedented Act in Leaving House of Lords

By GREGORY JENSEN
United Press International
London — July — On the last afternoon of July a slender, handsome, dark-haired man of 38 walked quickly into Britain's gilded House of Lords. An attendant greeted him at the door with the words: "Good evening, my lord."



A few minutes later the same man walked out of the House of Lords. This time the attendant said, "Good night, sir."

During those minutes, the second Lord Stansgate, Viscount of the United Kingdom and thus an automatic member of the House of Lords, had performed an act unprecedented in a thousand years of British history.

He had legally renounced his title. He disclaimed all right to be called "Lord Stansgate," to sit and vote in the House of Lords, to wear the traditional "two and a half rows of ermine, the coronet of 18 silver balls," to bear the privileges of peerage and the status which obliges Queen Elizabeth herself to address him as "our right trusty and well-beloved cousin."

At 6:22 p.m. that day, as a paper passed from his hand to that of Sir George Goldstream, the clerk of the crown in chancery, Viscount Stansgate became Mr. Anthony Neil Wedgwood Benn, commoner.

Two Vestiges Remain
Only two vestiges of Wedgwood Benn's former lordly status remain. One is the dormant title, to be inherited some day by Benn's eldest son Stephen, 12. The other is a test-tube full of the "noble blood" of the Viscount Stansgate who is no more.

"I had the blood specially extracted and bottled while I was in hospital in Bristol," Benn said. That was 10 days before he stepped into a lord and, as he put it, "acquired the infinitely greater distinction of being once more a plain mister — a citizen with a vote."

Anthony Wedgwood Benn had been fighting for 10 years for the right to be called "plain mister." Almost to the end it looked a losing fight.

He was only 17 when the story began. That was in 1942, when his father, William Wedgwood Benn, was created the first Viscount Stansgate. The elder Benn accepted the title reluctantly, and only to bolster his Labor party's representation in the House of

RENOUNCES TITLE—Anthony Wedgwood-Benn and his U.S. born wife, Caroline, leave the House of Commons after he legally renounced his title, disclaiming all right to be called "Lord Stansgate" and sit in the House of Lords. He wished to remain in the House of Commons, where political power now lies in England. (UPI)

Lords during the wartime coalition.
Brother Killed
Benn was not due to inherit the title at all. He had an older brother, Michael, who was first in line of succession. But Michael, a Royal air force pilot, was killed in World War Two, making the younger man the heir.

A pilot himself in the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy, Benn went up to Oxford after the war, taking a first degree with honors in 1946 and a master's degree with honors a year later.

Once out of the university, Wedgwood Benn plunged into politics. He was, like his father, a Laborite, and again like his father he early won a seat from 1950 to the time his father died in 1960 — and he became a viscount.

Even while his father was still alive, Benn had decided he didn't want the title.

Benn was determined to stay in politics — and the place for an ambitious politician in

deep in British history, he couldn't.

Then young Wedgwood Benn decided to try it on his own. In 1955 at his son's request, Lord Stansgate introduced a bill in the House of Lords permitting his heir to renounce the title.

Lord Stansgate spoke eloquently in support of the effort. Referring to the death of his eldest son, who should have inherited the title, he said "it heaped onto the un-

willing shoulders of this young man (Wedgwood Benn) honors which were going to bar him from all the ambitions of his life."

But their Lordships disagreed and by vote of 54 to 24 rejected the bill.

On Nov. 18, 1960, the first Viscount Stansgate died at 83. Much against his will, Anthony Wedgwood Benn became a lord, and could sit no longer in Commons. He plunged at once into a fight

that gained him world-wide attention as "the reluctant peer."

Benn announced he would never use the title. He refused to take his seat in the House

of Lords. He began a seemingly endless series of legal maneuvers to strip himself of his unwanted honors.

His greatest supporter was an unlikely one — his wife, Caroline Wedgwood Benn is an American. And as one British newspaper said in 1960,

UPI to Syndicate, Produce Newsfilm Services for TV

New York—UPI-United Press International announced today that effective Oct. 1 it will produce as well as syndicate its newsfilm services for television.

The announcements were made by Mims Thomason, president and general manager of United Press International, who said plans have now been completed for the inauguration on that date

of UPI's own newsfilm production facilities for serving its TV subscribers throughout the world.

For the past 12 years UPI's television newsfilm services have been produced in collaboration with Movietone News, which is discontinuing its activities in the domestic newsreel field. The arrangement will terminate Oct. 1.

Gov. Mark Hatfield has urged care in driving during the period Sept. 4 to 11, which has been designated as National Child Safety week.

In a statement issued this week, the governor reminded residents that schools throughout the state will be reopening with thousands of Oregon children en route to and from schools each day along the streets and highways traveling by foot and on bicycles.

There is obviously need for alertness on the part of motorists, in school zones, near playgrounds, or any area where groups of children are active, the governor continued.

The statement concluded that each Oregonian should cooperate in every possible manner, not only during this special week, but throughout the year, in making the streets and highways safe.

Portland—UPI—Portland police said Wednesday a widespread car theft ring has been broken up and four young men arrested here.

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just after the first Lord Stansgate died.
Wife Supports Him
"You might imagine that Mrs. Benn would love to be a Lady and contemplate all that ermine. But no, Mrs. Benn is Mr. Benn's most forceful supporter."
Mrs. Benn, who retains her American citizenship, remained outspoken in her husband's cause, and once said, "even if a title didn't stand in the way of my husband's career, I would always prefer to be plain 'Mrs.'"

The end of the battle came in sight in this year's parliament with the introduction in the House of Commons of the Peerage bill, commonly called the "Wedgwood Benn enabling bill." This time, with both Conservative and Labor Party support, it passed.

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