Benjamin Disraeli, 1st Earl of Beanconsfield, KG, PC, FRS, born Benjamin D'Israeli, (21 December 1804-19 April 1881), was a British Conservative statesman and literary figure. He served in government for three decades, twice as Prime Minister. An anglican, he was nonetheless the country's first and thus far only Prime Minister of Jewish heritage. He played an instrumental role in the creation of the modern Conservative Party after the Corn Laws schism of 1846.

Although a major figure in the protectionist wing of the Conservative Party after 1844, Disraeli's relations with the other leading figures in the party, particularly Lord Derby, the overall leader, were often strained. Not until the 1860s would Derby and Disraeli be on easy terms, and the latter's successions of the former assured. From 1852 onwards, Disraeli's career would also be marked by his often intense rivalry with William Gladstone, who eventually rose to become leader of the Liberal Party. In this feud, Disraeli was aided by his warm friendship with Queen Victoria, who came to detest Gladstone during the latter's first premiership in the 1870s. In 1876 Disraeli was raised to the peerage as the Earl of Beaconsfield, capping nearly four decades in the House of Commons.

Before and during his political career, Disraeli was well-known as a literary and social figure, although his novels are not generally regarded as a part of the Victorian literary canon. He mainly wrote romances, of
which Sybil and Vivian Grey are perhaps the best-known today. He is unusual among British Prime Minister for having gained equal social and political renown.

Disraeli turned towards literature after his financial disaster, motivated in part by a desperate need for money, and brought out his first novel, Vivian Grey, in 1826. Disraeli’s biographers agree that Vivian Grey was thinly-veiled re-telling of the affair of the Representative, and it proved very popular on its release, although it also caused much offence within the Tory literary world when Disraeli’s authorship was discovered. The book, initially anonymous, was purportedly written by a “man of fashion”- someone who moved in high society. Disraeli, then just twenty-three, did not move in high society, and the numerous solecisms present in Vivian Grey made this painfully obvious. Reviewers were sharply critical on these grounds of both the author and the book. Furthermore, John Murray believed that Disraeli had caricatured him and abused his confidence-an accusation denied at the time, and by the official biography, although subsequent biographers (notably Blake) have sided with Murray.

After producing a Vindication of the English Constitution, and some political pamphlets, Disraeli followed up Vivian Grey with a series of novels, The Young Duke (1831), Contarini Fleming (1832), Alroy (1833), Venetia and Henrietta Temple (1837). During the same period he had also written The Revolutionary Epick and three burlesques, Ixion, The Infernal Marriage, and Popanilla. Of these only Henrietta Temple (based on his affair
with Henrietta Sykes, wife of Sir Francis William Sykes, 3rd Bt) was a true success.

During the 1840s Disraeli wrote three political novels collectively known as "the Trilogy"—Sybil, Coningsby, and Tancred.

Disraeli's relationships with other male writers of his period were strained or non-existent. After the disaster of The Representative John Gibson Lockhart became a bitter enemy and the two never reconciled. Disraeli's preference for female company prevented the development of contact with those who were otherwise not alienated by his opinions, comportment or background. One contemporary who tried to bridge the gap, William Makepeace Thackeray, established a tentative cordial relationship in the late 1840s only to see everything collapse when Disraeli took offence at a burlesque of him which Thackeray penned for Punch. Disraeli took revenge in Endymion (published in 1880), when he caricatured Thackeray as "St. Barbe."

Critic William Kuhn argued much of Disraeli's fiction can be read as "the memoirs he never wrote", revealing the inner life of a politician for whom the norms of Victorian public life appealed to represent a social straitjacket—particularly with regard to his allegedly "ambiguous sexuality."

Disraeli had been considering a political career as early as 1830, before he departed England for the Mediterranean. His first real efforts, however, did not come until 1832, during the great crisis over the Reform Bill, when he contributed to an anti-Whig pamphlet edited by John Wilson
Croker and published by Murray entitled England and France: or a cure for Ministerial Gallomania. The choice of a Tory publication was regarded as odd by Disraeli's friends and relatives, who thought him more of a Radical. Indeed, Disraeli had objected to Murry about Croker inserting "high Tory" sentiment writing that "it is quite impossible that anything adverse to the general measure of Reform can issue from my pen." Further, at the time Gallomania was published, Disraeli was in fact electioneering in High Wycombe in the Radical interest. Disraeli's politics at the time were influenced both by his rebellious streak and by his desire to make his mark. In the early 1830s the Tories and the interests they represented appeared to be a lost cause. The other great party, the Whigs, was anathema to Disraeli: "Toryism is worn out & I cannot condescend to be a Whig."

Though he initially stood for election, unsuccessfully, as a Radical, Disraeli was a Tory by the time he won a seat in the House of Commons in 1837 representing the constituency of Maidstone. 1839 he settled his private life by marrying Mary Anne Lewis, the widow of Wyndham Lewis, Disraeli's erstwhile colleague at Maidstone. Mary Lewis was 12 years his senior, and their union was seen as being based on financial interests, but they came to cherish one another.

Although a Conservative, Disraeli was sympathetic to some of the demands of the Chartists and argued for an alliance between the landed aristocracy and the working class against the increasing power of the merchants and new industrialists in the middle class, helping to found the
Young England group in 1842 to promote the view that the landed interests should use their power to protect the poor from exploitation by middle-class businessmen. During the twenty years between the Corn Laws and the Second Reform Bill Disraeli would seek a Tory-Radical alliance, to little vail. Prior to the 1867 Reform Bill the working class did not possess the vote and therefore had little tangible political power. Although Disraeli forged a personal friendship with John Bright, a Lancashire manufacturer and leading Radical, Disraeli was unable to convince Bright to sacrifice principle for political gain. After one such attempt, Bright noted in his diary that Disraeli "seems unable to comprehend the morality of our political course."

In 1847 a small political crisis occurred which removed Bentinck from the leadership and highlighted Disraeli's differences with his own party. In the preceding general election, Lionel de Rothschild had been returned for the City of London. Ever since Catholic Emancipation, members of parliament were required to swear the oath "on the true faith of a Christian." Rothschild, an unconverted Jew, could not do so and therefore could not take his seat. Lord John Russell, the Whig leader who had succeeded Peel as Prime Minister and like Rothschild a member for the City of London, introduced a Jewish Disabilities Bill to amend the oath and permit Jews to enter Parliament.

Disraeli was elevated to the House of Lords in 1876 when Queen Victoria (who liked Disraeli both personally and politically) made him Earl of Beaconsfield and Viscount Hughenden.
In the general election of 1880 Disraeli's Conservatives were defeated by Gladstone's Liberals, in large part owing to the uneven course of the Second Anglo-Afghan War. The Irish Home Rule vote in England contributed to his party's defeat. Disraeli became ill soon after and died in April 1881. He is buried in a vault beneath St. Michael's Church in the grounds of his home, Hughenden Manor, accessed from the churchyard. Against the outside wall of the church is a memorial erected in his honour by Queen Victoria. His literary executor, and for all intents and purposes his heir, was his private secretary, Lord Rowton.
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

In office
20 February 1874-21 April 1880

Monarch
Victoria

Preceded by
William Gladstone

Succeeded by
William Gladstone

In office
27 February 1868-1 December 1868

Monarch
Victoria

Preceded by
The Earl of Derby

Succeeded by
William Gladstone

Chancellor of the Exchequer

In office
6 July 1866-29 February 1868

Monarch
Victoria

Preceded by
William Gladstone

Succeeded by
George Ward Hunt

In office
26 February 1858 - 11 June 1859

Monarch
Victoria

Preceded by
Sir George Cornewall Lewis, Bt.

Succeeded by
William Gladstone

In office
27 February 1852-17 December 1852

Monarch
Victoria

Preceded by
Charles Wood

Succeeded by
William Gladstone

Born
21 December 1804
London, England

Died
19 April 1881 (aged 76)
London, England

Political party
Conservative

Spouse
Mary Anne Lewis

Religion
Church of England
Judaism (until age 13)