THE SAVOY - ONE HUNDRED FIRSTS

1. The Savoy was the first luxury hotel to have been built in Britain. It opened in 1889.

2. The first artist to immortalise The Savoy was J.M. Whistler, who drew a picture of the scaffolding around The Savoy as it was being built between 1884 and 1889. He gave the sketch to his friend Richard D'Oyly Carte, saying that the hotel would never look so well again.

3. The Savoy was the first hotel to be built of incombustible material throughout.

4. First hotel to generate its own electricity supply, with the aid of steam generators. So much power was produced that The Savoy actually provided electricity for parts of the surrounding area around the Strand. The hotel was entirely lit by electricity, instead of the more dangerous gas.

5. First hotel to provide the majority of its rooms with private, ensuite bathrooms. What's more, the facilities were lavishly appointed in marble.

6. The Savoy was the first hotel to have its own artesian well, 420 ft deep.

7. First hotel to install electric lifts, known in typical Savoy fashion as 'ascending rooms'.

8. First hotel to provide constant hot and cold running water in each bedroom.

9. First hotel to use special glazed brickwork designed to prevent London's smoke-laden air from spoiling the external walls.

10. First hotel whose all-in tariff had no 'hidden extras'.

11. The Savoy provided its clientele with the first 24 hour room service.

12. First hotel to introduce room service facilitated by 'speaking tube' connected to the restaurant, which meant anything from a simple cup of tea to a fancy cocktail in the American Bar would be delivered 'in the twinkling of an Embankment lamp'.

13. First hotel to provide after-theatre suppers.

14. First hotel to use pink tablecloths. The rosy glow of soft lighting on the pink clothes was considered particularly flattering for ladies!

15. The first famous General Manager of The Savoy was legendary hotelier César Ritz. He introduced the practice of putting 'reserved' cards on all the best tables in the restaurant. In doing so, Ritz could give prominent placement to particularly glamorous guests, which pleased them, as it made them the centre of attention, and pleased the less glamorous guests who could happily "star-spot" from the other tables around the room.

16. The Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre, the first woman to smoke in public, chose The Savoy as her venue. On this infamous evening in 1896, the Duchesse smoked not one, but many cigarettes while lingering at the dinner table.

17. First hotel to introduce the practice of dinner-dances.

18. Legendary Maitre-chef Auguste Escoffier was the first famous chef at The Savoy. His reign over the Restaurant kitchens saw the invention of culinary standards such as Melba Toast (originally created for Madame Ritz), and Peche Melba.

19. Escoffier was the first to revolutionise British cooking methods at The Savoy. He improved the speed of service by creating an assembly line in his kitchen, requiring individual chefs to be responsible for preparing different stages of a dish. Each finished dish was checked by Escoffier before leaving the kitchen.

20. The first serviced apartments in Britain were built at The Savoy in 1904. The apartments were essentially one- or two-bed private flats, but with full access to all the amenities of the hotel. Residents included the actress Sarah Bernhardt, and Sir Thomas Dewar who lived in his apartment for 40 years.

21. First baby born at The Savoy was the classical musician, Peter Warlock, in 1894.

22. Artist Claude Monet first came to The Savoy in 1899. He returned twice more in 1900 and 1901, staying each time for about two months, and working on his famous series of views of The Thames looking up- and down-stream.

23. An American, Harry Rosenfeld, spent the first sovereign at The Savoy to pay for a bottle of *Moet et Chandon* champagne in 1889. The coin is still kept in the hotel safe.

24. The first (and last) time The Savoy's central courtyard was deliberately flooded was for the famous "Gondola Party" of 1905. The courtyard floor was made watertight and flooded to a depth of 4 feet, scenery erected around the walls, gondolas built, costumes designed, so that the host, George Kessler, an American millionaire, could entertain his guests in a recreated Venice. The two dozen guests ate their dinner seated in an enormous gondola in the centre of the courtyard, while after-dinner entertainment was provided by Enrico Caruso. At the climax of the evening a baby elephant lumbered in with a 5 ft birthday cake.

25. The first flight within the hotel took place on New Year's Eve, 1906. On the stroke of midnight, an aero-mobile (a hybrid motor-car and aeroplane) set off on rails fitted to the roof of the foyer, landed and ran between the diners as two ladies on board showered the party-goers with gifts.

26. The first man to fly across the English Channel, Louis Bleriot, won a prize of £1000, which had been offered by the "Daily Mail". The cheque was presented to M. Bleriot at a lunch at The Savoy the day after his successful flight.

27. The first socialite to cast her approval on dining out at The Savoy was society hostess Lady de Grey. She was encouraged by César Ritz to invite her friends to a banquet in the restaurant, thus establishing the hotel as a fashionable and respectable eaterie.

28. The Duc D'Orléans, claimant to the French throne, was the first guest for whom The Savoy obligingly stamped the *fleur-de-lis* crest on the crockery and linen he used.

29. The famous American Bar first entered the annals of Savoy history in 1893.

30. Savoy Court, leading to the Strand entrance of The Savoy, is the first and only road in Britain down which traffic travels on the right-hand side.

31. The Savoy was the first hotel to provide music while guests dined. The idea, said Ritz, was to 'cover the silence which hangs like a pall over an English dining table'.

32. The first carpet to cover a ½ acre area was laid in The Savoy foyer and restaurant in 1925. Experts were brought in from Samarkand to wed together the 60 oriental rugs.

33. The first hydraulically raised dance floor was installed at The Savoy in 1929.

34. The first hotel rooms with artificial sunshine, installed in 1929. The effect was achieved by glazing windows with *Vitaglass* to produce ultraviolet rays.

35. First hotel to install air-conditioning, steam-heating and soundproofed windows.

36. First hotel to install telephones in every bathroom.

37. Austrian opera singer Richard Tauber signed his first contract to sing in England on the back of a Savoy restaurant menu.

38. The two Savoy bands, the Savoy Havana Band and the Savoy Orpheans, were the first bands to broadcast regularly on BBC radio, beginning in 1923.

39. Guglielmo Marconi made the first wireless broadcast to the United States from The Savoy in 1923. This simple exchange of messages with the United States was transmitted in the middle of a programme of dance music by the Savoy Orpheans, broadcast weekly to British audiences. British listeners were able to hear the messages for themselves.

40. The first full-scale wireless transmission of a radio programme also took place at The Savoy in 1925 when the Savoy Orpheans broadcast two hours of dance music live to the East Coast of the USA from the ballroom at The Savoy.

41. George Gershwin gave 'Rhapsody in Blue' its English premiere in 1925 at The Savoy. The performance was broadcast simultaneously by BBC radio.

42. The first silver bathtub at The Savoy was installed by the Maharajah of Patalia who brought along 50 attendants for his visit to the hotel.

43. The Savoy was the first hotel to print its own menus, setting up a small printing department for the purpose.

44. First hotel to have custom-made sprung mattresses.

45. The first "hotel" novel based on serious research of the industry was Arnold Bennett's novel 'Imperial Palace' (1930). Bennett stayed at The Savoy for about three months before beginning to write, and researched every department both back and front of house. Although the events in the novel were, of course, fictitious, thinly disguised pen portraits of seven of the managers were easily recognised by themselves and their colleagues. The hotel was delighted by the publicity, and by its own depiction, which remains a vivid snap-shot of the working life of a luxury hotel in the 1920s.

46. The first meeting of the Other Club, a private dining club whose members have included almost every prime minister of the last and present century, took place at The Savoy in 1911. This Club has continued to meet regularly at The Savoy ever since.

47. At a private dinner at The Savoy in the early 1920s the American Ambassador General Davies was the first person to break with the tradition which forbade pipes to be smoked after formal dinners.

48. The first reigning monarch to dine in any hotel was George VI, who attended a private dinner at The Savoy in 1937.

49. In 1937 The Savoy became the first hotel to offer its own special blend of coffee for sale by mail order. To keep the formula secret, the beans were roasted and ground on the hotel's premises. Savoy Coffee was even supplied to the Royal Household, and the Coffee Department held a Royal Warrant for many years.

50. The first time that the then Princess Elizabeth was seen in public with her husband-to-be, Prince Philip of Greece, was at a wedding reception at The Savoy in 1946.

51. This reception was also notable for being the first time the entire Royal Family had gathered together in public since before World War II, and the first time in a London hotel.

52. The first time that the traditionally all-male Pilgrims dinner was attended by women was at The Savoy in 1948, when Eleanor Roosevelt was guest of honour after a ceremony to unveil a statue of her husband in Grosvenor Square earlier that day. For the first time members of this club could bring their wives and daughters. Among the other attendees were the then Princess Elizabeth and Duke of Edinburgh.

53. This was also the first public engagement that Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip had undertaken, since their wedding in November 1947.

54. The first hotelier to have a Royal title especially revived for him was Sir Hugh Wontner. After advising the Queen and Prince Philip on matters regarding the running of the Royal Household, he was given the title "Clerk of the Royal Kitchens" in 1953. The title had not been given to anyone for the previous 100 years.

55. Elizabeth Taylor spent part of her honeymoon with first husband Nick Hilton in a suite at The Savoy.

56. First power point for an electric toothbrush was installed for General Dwight Eisenhower.

57. When the blackout ended in 1945, The Savoy was the first public building to switch on its lights.

58. The first person to ride a horse into the Savoy ballroom was cowboy film star Tom Mix in 1925. Singing cowboy Gene Autrey and his famous steed Champion made a similar appearance in the ballroom in 1939.

59. The first Savoy pageboy to take an all-expenses-paid trip to India did so at the behest of a maharajah who needed a small parcel personally delivered.

60. Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh first laid eyes on each other at The Savoy.

61. First hotel to publish its own book of cocktail recipes. The Savoy Hotel Cocktail Book was first published in 1930, and has remained in print ever since.

62. First hotel with a silver-plate polishing machine.

63. In 1933 Les Debutantes appeared at The Savoy, the first time that a cabaret act composed of society debutantes appeared in a London restaurant for a full week's engagement.

64. Charleston Blues, a new dance in foxtrot tempo, was publicly demonstrated for the first time in England by Mr. and Mrs. Victor Silvester in the ballroom in 1933.

65. Although The Savoy has always kept records of its guests' preferences, the first photographic record of toilet articles was made at The Savoy for Noel Coward, so hotel attendants could lay them out in the bathroom exactly as he liked to find them each morning.

66. The Savoy was the first hotel to send a representative to New York to promote itself in the American market, and to help American travel agents to make bookings for their clients. The Savoy then invited other carefully chosen hotels to join in with this scheme, and eventually this one New York Office grew into the international organisation Leading Hotels of the World.

67. The Savoy was the first of the great London hotels to post a staff of couriers at London Airport.

68. First hotel to have its own laundry service – Postal Address, *Unblemish, London*.

69. The Savoy was the first hotel whose roof was used by golfing guests for teeing-off.

70. The first Managing Director of a hotel to be knighted for services to the industry was Sir George Reeves-Smith in 1938.

71. The first fireproof eiderdown provided to an unsuspecting guest was for actor Lionel Barrymore, who had a habit of chain-smoking while reading in bed.

72. The first Savoy Ball to feature Playboy Bunnies was in 1966, when a dozen girls from the Playboy Club were hired as hostesses, instead of the usual debutantes to give out programmes.

73. First time The Savoy was used as a film location was 1921 for 'Kipps' from the novel by H. G. Wells. Wells appeared as an extra in one scene.

74. The first wild animal to be brought to a party at The Savoy was Billy Butlin's pet leopard who came for a cocktail party to celebrate Smart's Circus.

75. First night party for Rogers and Hammerstein's 'South Pacific'.

76. Launch Ball for the epic film 'Cleopatra' starring Elizabeth Taylor.

77. First hotel to honour Hillary and Tensing, after their successful ascent of Mt Everest by flying champagne and caviar out to them in 1953.

78. First hotel to honour Neil Armstrong the first man to walk on the moon. In 1969 Head Barman in the American Bar, Joe Gilmore devised "Moonwalk" to celebrate this achievement. A flask of the cocktail was sent together with a dozen glasses to Houston by The Savoy for the astronauts to try on their return to Earth.

79. First hotel to serve frogs' legs to an unsuspecting public. At a dinner for the Prince of Wales, Auguste Escoffier produced a dish enticingly titled "Nymphes à l'Aurore". The Prince enjoyed the joke immensely.

80. First hotel to have 150lb of a rare fish called Tilapia flown in from Africa in 1959 for a dinner given by the late Aga Khan.

81. The first restaurant guests to order porridge and pea sandwiches were The Beatles, when they came to call on Bob Dylan in 1965.

82. First hotel in Britain to run its own school to train hoteliers. Graduates of the Savoy Training Centre can be found throughout the world.

83. In 1967, Lady Whitmore, the Swedish-born wife of British racing driver Sir John Whitmore, became the first woman to dine in The Savoy restaurant wearing trousers.

84. Lena Horne made her British debut appearance in cabaret at The Savoy.

85. The first hotel kitchen to be opened by the Queen Mother was in 1986 when she visited the Savoy Restaurant kitchens, which had been completely redesigned by Maitre-chef Anton Edelmann and refitted at a cost of £2½m.

86. The first British Maitre-chef at The Savoy was London-born Silvino Trompetto (1965-1980)

87. First celebrity flood in the hotel happened when Elton John let his bath overflow.

88. First Prime Ministers' reunion was held at The Savoy in 1973 when all PMs since 1900, or their heirs, attended a lunch to mark the publication of a limited edition of the complete works of Sir Winston Churchill.

89. Managing Director of The Savoy, Sir Hugh Wontner was the first hotelier to become Lord Mayor of London, in 1973.

90. The first car to be driven into The Savoy was the winning Bentley from the Le Mans 24-hour race in 1927. The car was shipped back to Britain and despite some damage managed to limp into the banqueting room where the celebratory party was being held. Bentley recreated this party (having again won Le Mans) in 2003.

91. Premiere party for the first film of the one of the most successful children's books in the world – "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone"

92. The first luxury hotel in London to have its own "Writer in Residence Scheme". Previous writers in residence on the Savoy site have included Geoffrey Chaucer and Henry Fielding, but The Savoy's scheme has given residency to Fay Weldon, Kathy Lette, and later this year, Frank McCourt.

93. The first time that Charlie Chaplin returned to Britain after many years in the United States, bringing his family on their first visit to his home country, he spent the entire time at The Savoy (the hotel was mobbed by adoring fans for the duration of his stay!).

94. The Savoy was the first hotel to have its own poultry farm! This was set up by Sir Hugh Wontner to help provide a steady source of both chicken and eggs during WWII when supplies were scarce, and the price under the strict control of the Ministry of Food. The farm continued to supply The Savoy for some years after peace was declared.

95. In 1943 the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands had lunch at The Savoy in the private dining room “Patience” together with the Belgian and Netherlands Ministers of Finance, and a few other people. This was the first beginnings of the economic union known as Benelux, which came into being a few years later.

96. Marilyn Monroe gave her first press conference in Britain at The Savoy when she came over to film “The Prince and the Showgirl” (1957). She was photographed drinking tea, while wearing a dress with a transparent midriff, considered extremely daring for the time.

97. When the post office received a letter addressed simply to “The Manager of the Greatest Hotel in London”, the first place that sprang to mind was The Savoy. The letter was duly delivered, marked “Try Savoy Hotel, WC2”.

98. The first rose created for The Savoy was The Savoy Hotel Rose commemorating the hotel’s centenary

99. First hotel to have a centenary flag. Although The Savoy is not the oldest hotel in London, it IS the oldest luxury hotel.

100. The Savoy is the first hotel in the United Kingdom to become a Fairmont Hotel