

= Buckingham Palace =

Buckingham Palace ( UK / ˈbʊkɪŋɡəm / ˈpæləs / ) is the London residence and administrative headquarters of the reigning monarch of the United Kingdom . Located in the City of Westminster , the palace is often at the centre of state occasions and royal hospitality . It has been a focal point for the British people at times of national rejoicing and mourning .

Originally known as Buckingham House , the building at the core of today 's palace was a large townhouse built for the Duke of Buckingham in 1703 on a site that had been in private ownership for at least 150 years . It was acquired by King George III in 1761 as a private residence for Queen Charlotte and became known as " The Queen 's House " . During the 19th century it was enlarged , principally by architects John Nash and Edward Blore , who constructed three wings around a central courtyard . Buckingham Palace became the London residence of the British monarch on the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 .

The last major structural additions were made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries , including the East front , which contains the well @-@ known balcony on which the royal family traditionally congregates to greet crowds . The palace chapel was destroyed by a German bomb during World War II ; the Queen 's Gallery was built on the site and opened to the public in 1962 to exhibit works of art from the Royal Collection .

The original early 19th @-@ century interior designs , many of which survive , include widespread use of brightly coloured scagliola and blue and pink lapis , on the advice of Sir Charles Long . King Edward VII oversaw a partial redecoration in a Belle Époque cream and gold colour scheme . Many smaller reception rooms are furnished in the Chinese regency style with furniture and fittings brought from the Royal Pavilion at Brighton and from Carlton House . The palace has 775 rooms , and the garden is the largest private garden in London . The state rooms , used for official and state entertaining , are open to the public each year for most of August and September , and on selected days in winter and spring .

= = History = =

= = = Site = = =

In the Middle Ages , the site of the future palace formed part of the Manor of Ebury ( also called Eia ) . The marshy ground was watered by the river Tyburn , which still flows below the courtyard and south wing of the palace . Where the river was fordable ( at Cow Ford ) , the village of Eye Cross grew . Ownership of the site changed hands many times ; owners included Edward the Confessor and his queen consort Edith of Wessex in late Saxon times , and , after the Norman Conquest , William the Conqueror . William gave the site to Geoffrey de Mandeville , who bequeathed it to the monks of Westminster Abbey .

In 1531 , King Henry VIII acquired the Hospital of St James ( later St James 's Palace ) from Eton College , and in 1536 he took the Manor of Ebury from Westminster Abbey . These transfers brought the site of Buckingham Palace back into royal hands for the first time since William the Conqueror had given it away almost 500 years earlier .

Various owners leased it from royal landlords and the freehold was the subject of frenzied speculation during the 17th century . By then , the old village of Eye Cross had long since fallen into decay , and the area was mostly wasteland . Needing money , James I sold off part of the Crown freehold but retained part of the site on which he established a 4 @-@ acre ( 16 @,@ 000 m2 ) mulberry garden for the production of silk . ( This is at the northwest corner of today 's palace . ) Clement Walker in *Anarchia Anglicana* ( 1649 ) refers to " new @-@ erected sodoms and spintries at the Mulberry Garden at S. James 's " ; this suggests it may have been a place of debauchery . Eventually , in the late 17th century , the freehold was inherited from the property tycoon Sir Hugh Audley by the great heiress Mary Davies .

= = = First houses on the site = = =

= = = = Goring House = = = =

Possibly the first house erected within the site was that of a Sir William Blake , around 1624 . The next owner was Lord Goring , who from 1633 extended Blake 's house and developed much of today 's garden , then known as Goring Great Garden . He did not , however , obtain the freehold interest in the mulberry garden . Unbeknown to Goring , in 1640 the document " failed to pass the Great Seal before King Charles I fled London , which it needed to do for legal execution " . It was this critical omission that helped the British royal family regain the freehold under King George III .

= = = = Arlington House = = = =

The improvident Goring defaulted on his rents ; Henry Bennet , 1st Earl of Arlington obtained the mansion and was occupying it , now known as Goring House , when it burned down in 1674 . Arlington House rose on the site ? the southern wing of today 's palace ? the next year . In 1698 , John Sheffield , later the first Duke of Buckingham and Normanby , acquired the lease .

= = = = Buckingham House = = = =

The house which forms the architectural core of the palace was built for the first Duke of Buckingham and Normanby in 1703 to the design of William Winde . The style chosen was of a large , three @-@ floored central block with two smaller flanking service wings . Buckingham House was eventually sold by Buckingham 's descendant , Sir Charles Sheffield , in 1761 to George III for £ 21 @,@ 000 . Sheffield 's leasehold on the mulberry garden site , the freehold of which was still owned by the royal family , was due to expire in 1774 .

= = = From Queen 's House to palace = = =

Under the new crown ownership , the building was originally intended as a private retreat for King George III 's wife , Queen Charlotte , and was accordingly known as The Queen 's House ? 14 of their 15 children were born there . St James 's Palace , however , remained the official and ceremonial royal residence .

Remodelling of the structure began in 1762 . After his accession to the throne in 1820 , King George IV continued the renovation with the idea in mind of a small , comfortable home . While the work was in progress , in 1826 , the King decided to modify the house into a palace with the help of his architect John Nash . Some furnishings were transferred from Carlton House , and others had been bought in France after the French Revolution . The external façade was designed keeping in mind the French neo @-@ classical influence preferred by George IV . The cost of the renovations grew dramatically , and by 1829 the extravagance of Nash 's designs resulted in his removal as architect . On the death of George IV in 1830 , his younger brother King William IV hired Edward Blore to finish the work . At one stage , William considered converting the palace into the new Houses of Parliament , after the destruction of the Palace of Westminster by fire in 1834 .

= = Home of the monarch = =

Buckingham Palace finally became the principal royal residence in 1837 , on the accession of Queen Victoria , who was the first monarch to reside there ; her predecessor William IV had died before its completion . While the state rooms were a riot of gilt and colour , the necessities of the new palace were somewhat less luxurious . For one thing , it was reported the chimneys smoked so much that the fires had to be allowed to die down , and consequently the court shivered in icy magnificence . Ventilation was so bad that the interior smelled , and when a decision was taken to

install gas lamps , there was a serious worry about the build @-@ up of gas on the lower floors . It was also said that staff were lax and lazy and the palace was dirty . Following the queen 's marriage in 1840 , her husband , Prince Albert , concerned himself with a reorganisation of the household offices and staff , and with the design faults of the palace . The problems were all rectified by the close of 1840 . However , the builders were to return within the decade .

By 1847 , the couple had found the palace too small for court life and their growing family , and consequently the new wing , designed by Edward Blore , was built by Thomas Cubitt , enclosing the central quadrangle . The large East Front , facing The Mall , is today the " public face " of Buckingham Palace , and contains the balcony from which the royal family acknowledge the crowds on momentous occasions and after the annual Trooping the Colour . The ballroom wing and a further suite of state rooms were also built in this period , designed by Nash 's student Sir James Pennethorne .

Before Prince Albert 's death , the palace was frequently the scene of musical entertainments , and the greatest contemporary musicians entertained at Buckingham Palace . The composer Felix Mendelssohn is known to have played there on three occasions . Johann Strauss II and his orchestra played there when in England . Strauss 's " Alice Polka " was first performed at the palace in 1849 in honour of the queen 's daughter , Princess Alice . Under Victoria , Buckingham Palace was frequently the scene of lavish costume balls , in addition to the usual royal ceremonies , investitures and presentations .

Widowed in 1861 , the grief @-@ stricken Queen withdrew from public life and left Buckingham Palace to live at Windsor Castle , Balmoral Castle and Osborne House . For many years the palace was seldom used , even neglected . In 1864 , a note was found pinned to the fence of Buckingham Palace , saying : " These commanding premises to be let or sold , in consequence of the late occupant 's declining business . " Eventually , public opinion forced the Queen to return to London , though even then she preferred to live elsewhere whenever possible . Court functions were still held at Windsor Castle , presided over by the sombre Queen habitually dressed in mourning black , while Buckingham Palace remained shuttered for most of the year .

= = = Interior = = =

The palace measures 108 metres ( 354 ft ) by 120 metres ( 390 ft ) , is 24 metres ( 79 ft ) high and contains over 77 @,@ 000 m<sup>2</sup> ( 830 @,@ 000 sq ft ) of floorspace . The floor area is smaller than the Royal Palace of Madrid , the Papal Palace in Rome , the Louvre in Paris , the Hofburg Palace in Vienna , or the Forbidden City . There are 775 rooms , including 19 state rooms , 52 principal bedrooms , 188 staff bedrooms , 92 offices , and 78 bathrooms . The palace also has its own post office , cinema , swimming pool , doctor 's surgery , and jeweller 's workshop .

The principal rooms are contained on the piano nobile behind the west @-@ facing garden façade at the rear of the palace . The centre of this ornate suite of state rooms is the Music Room , its large bow the dominant feature of the façade . Flanking the Music Room are the Blue and the White Drawing Rooms . At the centre of the suite , serving as a corridor to link the state rooms , is the Picture Gallery , which is top @-@ lit and 55 yards ( 50 m ) long . The Gallery is hung with numerous works including some by Rembrandt , van Dyck , Rubens and Vermeer ; other rooms leading from the Picture Gallery are the Throne Room and the Green Drawing Room . The Green Drawing Room serves as a huge anteroom to the Throne Room , and is part of the ceremonial route to the throne from the Guard Room at the top of the Grand Staircase . The Guard Room contains white marble statues of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert , in Roman costume , set in a tribune lined with tapestries . These very formal rooms are used only for ceremonial and official entertaining , but are open to the public every summer .

Directly underneath the State Apartments is a suite of slightly less grand rooms known as the semi @-@ state apartments . Opening from the Marble Hall , these rooms are used for less formal entertaining , such as luncheon parties and private audiences . Some of the rooms are named and decorated for particular visitors , such as the 1844 Room , decorated in that year for the State visit of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia , and , on the other side of the Bow Room , the 1855 Room , in honour

of the visit of Emperor Napoleon III of France . At the centre of this suite is the Bow Room , through which thousands of guests pass annually to the Queen 's Garden Parties in the Gardens . The Queen and Prince Philip use a smaller suite of rooms in the north wing .

Between 1847 and 1850 , when Blore was building the new east wing , the Brighton Pavilion was once again plundered of its fittings . As a result , many of the rooms in the new wing have a distinctly oriental atmosphere . The red and blue Chinese Luncheon Room is made up from parts of the Brighton Banqueting and Music Rooms with a large oriental chimney piece sculpted by Richard Westmacott . The Yellow Drawing Room has wallpaper supplied in 1817 for the Brighton Saloon , and a chimney piece which is a European vision of how the Chinese chimney piece may appear . It has nodding mandarins in niches and fearsome winged dragons , designed by Robert Jones .

At the centre of this wing is the famous balcony with the Centre Room behind its glass doors . This is a Chinese @-@ style saloon enhanced by Queen Mary , who , working with the designer Sir Charles Allom , created a more " binding " Chinese theme in the late 1920s , although the lacquer doors were brought from Brighton in 1873 . Running the length of the piano nobile of the east wing is the great gallery , modestly known as the Principal Corridor , which runs the length of the eastern side of the quadrangle . It has mirrored doors , and mirrored cross walls reflecting porcelain pagodas and other oriental furniture from Brighton . The Chinese Luncheon Room and Yellow Drawing Room are situated at each end of this gallery , with the Centre Room obviously placed in the centre .

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When paying a state visit to Britain , foreign heads of state are usually entertained by the Queen at Buckingham Palace . They are allocated a large suite of rooms known as the Belgian Suite , situated at the foot of the Minister 's Staircase , on the ground floor of the north @-@ facing Garden Wing . The rooms of the suite are linked by narrow corridors , one of them is given extra height and perspective by saucer domes designed by Nash in the style of Soane . A second corridor in the suite has Gothic influenced cross over vaulting . The Belgian Rooms themselves were decorated in their present style and named after Prince Albert 's uncle Léopold I , first King of the Belgians . In 1936 , the suite briefly became the private apartments of the palace when they were occupied by King Edward VIII .

= = = Court ceremonies = = =

= = = Court dress = = =

Formerly , men not wearing military uniform wore knee breeches of an 18th @-@ century design . Women 's evening dress included obligatory trains and tiaras or feathers in their hair ( or both ) . The dress code governing formal court uniform and dress has progressively relaxed . After World War I , when Queen Mary wished to follow fashion by raising her skirts a few inches from the ground , she requested a lady @-@ in @-@ waiting to shorten her own skirt first to gauge the king 's reaction . King George V was horrified , so the queen kept her hemline unfashionably low . Following their accession in 1936 , King George VI and his consort , Queen Elizabeth , allowed the hemline of daytime skirts to rise . Today , there is no official dress code . Most men invited to Buckingham Palace in the daytime choose to wear service uniform or lounge suits ; a minority wear morning coats , and in the evening , depending on the formality of the occasion , black tie or white tie .

= = = Presentation of débutantes = = =

Court presentations of aristocratic young ladies to the monarch took place at the palace from the reign of Edward VII . These young women were known as débutantes , and the occasion ? termed their " coming out " ? represented their first entrée into society . Débutantes wore full court dress ,

with three tall ostrich feathers in their hair . They entered , curtsied , and performed a choreographed backwards walk and a further curtsy , while manoeuvring a dress train of prescribed length . ( The ceremony , known as an evening court , corresponded to the " court drawing rooms " of Victoria 's reign . ) After World War II , the ceremony was replaced by less formal afternoon receptions , usually without choreographed curtsies and court dress .

In 1958 , the Queen abolished the presentation parties for débutantes , replacing them with Garden Parties .

===== Investitures =====

Investitures , which include the conferring of knighthoods by dubbing with a sword , and other awards take place in the palace 's Ballroom , built in 1854 . At 36 @. @ 6 m ( 120 ft ) long , 18 m ( 59 ft ) wide and 13 @. @ 5 m ( 44 ft ) high , it is the largest room in the palace . It has replaced the throne room in importance and use . During investitures , the Queen stands on the throne dais beneath a giant , domed velvet canopy , known as a shamiana or a baldachin , that was used at the Delhi Durbar in 1911 . A military band plays in the musicians ' gallery as award recipients approach the Queen and receive their honours , watched by their families and friends .

===== State banquets =====

State banquets also take place in the Ballroom ; these formal dinners are held on the first evening of a state visit by a foreign head of state . On these occasions , for up to 170 guests in formal " white tie and decorations " , including tiaras , the dining table is laid with the Grand Service , a collection of silver @- @ gilt plate made in 1811 for the Prince of Wales , later George IV . The largest and most formal reception at Buckingham Palace takes place every November when the Queen entertains members of the diplomatic corps . On this grand occasion , all the state rooms are in use , as the royal family proceed through them , beginning at the great north doors of the Picture Gallery . As Nash had envisaged , all the large , double @- @ mirrored doors stand open , reflecting the numerous crystal chandeliers and sconces , creating a deliberate optical illusion of space and light .

===== Other ceremonies and functions =====

Smaller ceremonies such as the reception of new ambassadors take place in the " 1844 Room " . Here too , the Queen holds small lunch parties , and often meetings of the Privy Council . Larger lunch parties often take place in the curved and domed Music Room , or the State Dining Room . On all formal occasions , the ceremonies are attended by the Yeomen of the Guard in their historic uniforms , and other officers of the court such as the Lord Chamberlain .

Since the bombing of the palace chapel in World War II , royal christenings have sometimes taken place in the Music Room . The Queen 's first three children were all baptised there .

The largest functions of the year are the Queen 's Garden Parties for up to 8 @, @ 000 invitees in the Garden .

===== Security breaches =====

The boy Jones was an intruder who gained entry to the palace on three occasions between 1838 and 1841 as recorded by Charles Dickens some 40 years later . In 1982 , Michael Fagan broke into the palace twice but , contrary to media reports of the time , did not speak to the Queen . It was only in 2007 that trespassing on the palace grounds became a criminal offence .

===== Garden , Royal Mews and The Mall =====

At the rear of the palace is the large and park @- @ like garden , which together with its lake is the largest private garden in London . There , the Queen hosts her annual garden parties each summer

, and also holds large functions to celebrate royal milestones , such as jubilees . It covers 40 acres ( 16 ha ) , and includes a helicopter landing area , a lake , and a tennis court .

Adjacent to the palace is the Royal Mews , also designed by Nash , where the royal carriages , including the Gold State Coach , are housed . This rococo gilt coach , designed by Sir William Chambers in 1760 , has painted panels by G. B. Cipriani . It was first used for the State Opening of Parliament by George III in 1762 and has been used by the monarch for every coronation since George IV . It was last used for the Golden Jubilee of Elizabeth II . Also housed in the mews are the coach horses used at royal ceremonial processions .

The Mall , a ceremonial approach route to the palace , was designed by Sir Aston Webb and completed in 1911 as part of a grand memorial to Queen Victoria . It extends from Admiralty Arch , across St James 's Park to the Victoria Memorial . This route is used by the cavalcades and motorcades of visiting heads of state , and by the royal family on state occasions such as the annual Trooping the Colour .

= = Modern history = =

In 1901 the accession of Edward VII saw new life breathed into the palace . The new King and his wife Queen Alexandra had always been at the forefront of London high society , and their friends , known as " the Marlborough House Set " , were considered to be the most eminent and fashionable of the age . Buckingham Palace ? the Ballroom , Grand Entrance , Marble Hall , Grand Staircase , vestibules and galleries redecorated in the Belle époque cream and gold colour scheme they retain today ? once again became a setting for entertaining on a majestic scale but leaving some to feel King Edward 's heavy redecorations were at odds with Nash 's original work .

The last major building work took place during the reign of King George V when , in 1913 , Sir Aston Webb redesigned Blore 's 1850 East Front to resemble in part Giacomo Leoni 's Lyme Park in Cheshire . This new , refaced principal façade ( of Portland stone ) was designed to be the backdrop to the Victoria Memorial , a large memorial statue of Queen Victoria , placed outside the main gates . George V , who had succeeded Edward VII in 1910 , had a more serious personality than his father ; greater emphasis was now placed on official entertaining and royal duties than on lavish parties . He arranged a series of command performances featuring jazz musicians such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band ( 1919 ) ? the first jazz performance for a head of state , Sidney Bechet , and Louis Armstrong ( 1932 ) , which earned the palace a nomination in 2009 for a ( Kind of ) Blue Plaque by the Brecon Jazz Festival as one of the venues making the greatest contribution to jazz music in the United Kingdom . George V 's wife Queen Mary was a connoisseur of the arts , and took a keen interest in the Royal Collection of furniture and art , both restoring and adding to it . Queen Mary also had many new fixtures and fittings installed , such as the pair of marble Empire @-@ style chimneypieces by Benjamin Vulliamy , dating from 1810 , which the Queen had installed in the ground floor Bow Room , the huge low room at the centre of the garden façade . Queen Mary was also responsible for the decoration of the Blue Drawing Room . This room , 69 feet ( 21 metres ) long , previously known as the South Drawing Room , has a ceiling designed specially by Nash , coffered with huge gilt console brackets .

During World War I , the palace , then the home of King George V and Queen Mary , escaped unscathed . Its more valuable contents were evacuated to Windsor but the royal family remained in situ . The King imposed rationing at the palace , much to the dismay of his guests and household . To the King 's later regret , David Lloyd George persuaded him to go further by ostentatiously locking the wine cellars and refraining from alcohol , to set a good example to the supposedly inebriated working class . The workers continued to imbibe and the King was left unhappy at his enforced abstinence . In 1938 , the north @-@ west pavilion , designed by Nash as a conservatory , was converted into a swimming pool .

During World War II , the palace was bombed nine times , the most serious and publicised of which resulted in the destruction of the palace chapel in 1940 . Coverage of this event was played in cinemas all over the UK to show the common suffering of rich and poor . One bomb fell in the palace quadrangle while King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were in residence , and many windows were

blown in and the chapel destroyed . War @-@ time coverage of such incidents was severely restricted , however . The King and Queen were filmed inspecting their bombed home , the smiling Queen , as always , immaculately dressed in a hat and matching coat seemingly unbothered by the damage around her . It was at this time the Queen famously declared : " I 'm glad we have been bombed . Now I can look the East End in the face " . The royal family were seen as sharing their subjects ' hardship , as The Sunday Graphic reported :

By the Editor : The King and Queen have endured the ordeal which has come to their subjects . For the second time a German bomber has tried to bring death and destruction to the home of Their Majesties ? When this war is over the common danger which King George and Queen Elizabeth have shared with their people will be a cherished memory and an inspiration through the years .

On 15 September 1940 , known as the Battle of Britain Day , an RAF pilot , Ray Holmes of No. 504 Squadron RAF rammed a German bomber he believed was going to bomb the Palace . Holmes had run out of ammunition and made the quick decision to ram it . Holmes bailed out . Both aircraft crashed . In fact the Dornier Do 17 bomber was empty . It had already been damaged , two of its crew had been killed and the remainder bailed out . Its pilot , Feldwebel Robert Zehbe , landed , only to die later of wounds suffered during the attack . During the Dornier 's descent , it somehow unloaded its bombs , one of which hit the Palace . It then crashed into the forecourt of London Victoria station . The bomber 's engine was later exhibited at the Imperial War Museum in London . The British pilot became a King 's Messenger after the war , and died at the age of 90 in 2005 .

On VE Day ? 8 May 1945 ? the palace was the centre of British celebrations . The King , Queen , Princess Elizabeth ( the future Queen ) , and Princess Margaret appeared on the balcony , with the palace 's blacked @-@ out windows behind them , to the cheers from a vast crowd in the Mall . The damaged Palace was carefully restored after the War by John Mowlem & Co .

= = = 21st century : Royal use and public access = = =

Every year some 50 @,@ 000 invited guests are entertained at garden parties , receptions , audiences and banquets . The Garden Parties , usually three , are held in the summer , usually in July . The Forecourt of Buckingham Palace is used for Changing of the Guard , a major ceremony and tourist attraction ( daily from April to July ; every other day in other months ) .

The palace , like Windsor Castle , is owned by the Crown . It is not the monarch 's personal property , unlike Sandringham House and Balmoral Castle . Many of the contents from Buckingham Palace , Windsor Castle , Kensington Palace , and St James 's Palace are part of the Royal Collection , held in trust by the Sovereign ; they can , on occasion , be viewed by the public at the Queen 's Gallery , near the Royal Mews . Unlike the palace and the castle , the purpose @-@ built gallery is open continually and displays a changing selection of items from the collection . It occupies the site of the chapel destroyed by an air raid in World War II . The palace 's state rooms have been open to the public during August and September and on selected dates throughout the year since 1993 . The money raised in entry fees was originally put towards the rebuilding of Windsor Castle after the 1992 fire devastated many of its state rooms . 476 @,@ 000 people visited the palace in the year to 31 March 2015 .

Her Majesty 's Government is responsible for maintaining the palace in exchange for the profits made by the Crown Estate . In November 2015 , the State Dining Room was closed for six months because its ceiling had become potentially dangerous . A backlog of repairs , including new plumbing , wiring , and the removal of a large quantity of asbestos , would cost an estimated £ 150 million .

Thus , Buckingham Palace is a symbol and home of the British monarchy , an art gallery and a tourist attraction . Behind the gilded railings and gates which were completed by the Bromsgrove Guild in 1911 and Webb 's famous façade , which has been described in a book published by the Royal Collection as looking " like everybody 's idea of a palace " , is not only a weekday home of the Queen and Prince Philip but also the London residence of the Duke of York and the Earl and Countess of Wessex . The palace also houses the offices of the Queen , Prince Philip , the Duke of York , the Earl and Countess of Wessex , the Princess Royal , and Princess Alexandra , and is the

workplace of more than 800 people .