



It's been the official home of the British Monarchy since the 1830s, but how much do you know about Buckingham Palace?

Origins

Firstly, it hasn't always been a palace. It began life as a manor house which was constructed in the early 18th century for John Sheffield, the 1st Duke of Buckingham.

The Royals move in

In 1761, King George III (whose reign was defined by bouts of mental illness) acquired Buckingham House for his wife, Queen Charlotte. Consequently, the residence became known as the Queen's House. During this era St James's Palace was the official royal court and the Queen's Palace was used as a private residence.

Mozart pops by

In 1764, a young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart performed at the Queen's House- he was just eight years old at the time. Both George and Charlotte adored the child prodigy.

Redevelopment

After George III died in 1820, his son- also called George- inherited Queen's House. Generally regarded to be a selfish and deeply unpleasant man, George IV had wasted huge amounts of money during the lengthy periods when his father had been unwell. Keeping in line with his spending, he decided to greatly expand the palace- although he himself died before he could see the project come to fruition.

Marble Arch

George IV's upgrade included a triumphal arch which was designed as an imposing entrance to the palace. However, when further expansion was carried out in the 1830s, the arch stood in the way and so it was dismantled and moved just over a mile away to the junction of Oxford Street and Edgware Road where it remains to this day.

It's official

The first monarch to use Buckingham Palace as the official royal residence was Queen Victoria, who moved in shortly after her coronation in 1838. Initially though she was unhappy with the building- the work to expand it had been shoddy, resulting in unventilated lavatories and windows which couldn't open.

Main entrance

The official entrance to Buckingham Place is situated some distance away on the spot known as Horse Guard's Parade which is located between Whitehall and St James's Palace. Here you can see the Queen's Life Guard; soldiers mounted on horseback.

The Royal Guard

The famous royal guards- who stand as still as statues outside Buckingham Palace in their red and black uniforms- are not just there for ceremonial duties. Like their counterparts on Horse Guards Parade, they are highly trained active soldiers- upset them at your peril.

Queen Victoria Memorial

The large statue of Queen Victoria which stands outside the palace was created in the early 20th century. Its nickname is the 'Wedding Cake'.

The flip side of Buckingham Palace

If you've ever wondered what the other side of Buckingham Palace looks like, then here you are. This side overlooks London's largest private garden.

The palace at war

During WWII, Buckingham Palace was bombed on nine separate occasions. On the 15th September 1940 however, one such attack was thwarted when RAF pilot, Raymond Holmes rammed his Hurricane Fighter into a Nazi bomber as it prepared to attack. The enemy plane crashed outside nearby Victoria station whilst Raymond managed to bail out safely over Chelsea.

An unwelcome visitor

Despite the palace's tight security, a fellow named Michael Fagan managed to scale the walls and sneak into the building early on the morning of 9th July 1982. During his daring escapade, Fagan managed to find his way to the Queen's bedroom where Her Majesty managed to calmly deal with the situation.

Is the Queen in?

If Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is in residence, you will see a flag known as the Royal Standard flying from the palace's roof.

Buckingham Palace today

Today, Buckingham Palace remains the HQ of the British royal family and as such is a busy, functional building. The palace contains 775 rooms including 19 State rooms, 52 Royal and guest bedrooms, 188 staff bedrooms, 92 office and 78 bathrooms.

Visiting the palace

Certain parts of Buckingham Place are open to the public for a period of ten weeks every summer. The 2019 seasons runs from 20 July to 29 September. You won't be able to peek into the Queen's living room, but what you will see are the magnificent State Rooms which are used for entertaining guests and the south side of the palace's huge, walled garden. Please note that airport-style security checks are in place.

The Queen's Gallery, which is adjacent to the palace on Buckingham Gate, is open all year round. The gallery contains a stunning collection of antiques and artworks- including 200 Leonardo da Vinci drawings which are on display until 13 October 2019.

Getting there

The nearest tube stations are St James's Park, Victoria, Green Park and Hyde Park Corner. The area around the palace is served by bus routes 11, 211, C1 and C10. Victoria Coach Station is also a short walk away.