

# Factsheet

## History of Kensington Palace

Kensington Palace was once a favoured home of some of Britain's famous kings and queens and the setting for many great events and dramas in royal history. Today, parts of the palace remain a private residence for members of the Royal Family. The State Apartments are open to the public and house the lavishly decorated King's and Queen's Apartments and the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection.

Kensington Palace was built as a private country house called Nottingham House in about 1605. It was purchased by William III and Mary II in the summer of 1689 from William's trusted Secretary of State, Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham, at a cost of £20,000. The house was adapted for royal residence by Sir Christopher Wren, Surveyor of the King's Works. For the next 70 years the palace was at the centre of the life and government of the kingdom and played host to the courts of William and Mary, Queen Anne, George I and George II. However, when George III came to the throne in October 1760 he made Buckingham Palace his principal London home and Kensington ceased to serve as the seat of a reigning monarch.

One of the most well-known residents of Kensington Palaces was Princess Victoria. On 24 May 1819 Princess Victoria was born at Kensington Palace and she was christened the following month in a private ceremony in the Cupola Room. Eighteen years later, Princess Victoria was awakened at Kensington Palace early in the morning of 20 June 1837 with news of her accession to the throne. Her first Privy Council was held in the Red Saloon on this day, before the young Queen moved permanently to Buckingham Palace with her mother.

The private apartments at Kensington Palace continued to be used by members of the Royal Family throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the State Apartments were sadly neglected and were used as stores for various paintings and furnishings from other palaces. It was only Queen Victoria's love for the palace in which she had

grown up that saved it: in April 1897, Parliament was persuaded to pay for the restoration of the State Apartments on condition they should be opened to the public. The State Apartments were opened to the public on Queen Victoria's birthday, 24 May 1899.

Today the State Apartments comprise the King's and Queen's Apartments (interpreted to represent the time of King William III and Queen Mary II) and the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, all open daily to the public. The private side of Kensington Palace has been home in recent years to Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth II, and Diana, Princess of Wales.