

Factsheet

Kew Palace 'Baby House'

- According to family tradition this wooden dolls' house was made by the carpenter on the Royal Yacht for the young daughters of King George III around 1780. The princesses would have played with the house between 1780-1790.
- Princess Mary wrote about a dolls' house at Kew Palace and it is very possible that this is the same one.
- Towards the close of the 18th century the princesses visited the children of the Flag Captain on the King's yacht, at their residence in Weymouth. The dolls' house was presented to them as a gift by the Royal children to commemorate their visit. A paper label inside the door reads: *"This dolls house was made by the children of George III then staying at Weymouth and given by them to the children of Sir George Grey, my grandfather who was Flag Captain on the King's ship. Mary Bonham Cater, October 1904"*
- The house is an incredibly rare survivor from the Georgian period and remarkably most of its original features and furnishings, some of which were made by the young princesses, remain intact.
- Historic Royal Palaces acquired this charming dolls' house (or 'baby house' as they were known in the Georgian period) in Spring 2004 for display at Kew Palace. It was an incredible discovery by curators who were unaware of its very existence until they were approached by a dolls house collector several years ago. After it had failed to sell at auction nearly a decade previously it ended up with a New York art dealer. Some ten years on they were still looking for a suitable buyer and HRP were fortunate to purchase it for display.
- The house has provided curators with a fascinating insight into the royal princesses' taste in interior decoration and their highly skilled handiwork. These include bright green verditer wallpaper, an embroidered bed and painted furniture, made in the fashionable style of George Hepplewhite, so popular at the time. Most interesting has been the striking parallels between discoveries made inside Kew Palace itself including similar decoration and furnishings,

such as fitted carpets, working bed-pulls and fine grained paintwork, and the baby house.

- The dolls house and furniture has required some conservation work, as would be expected with any piece several hundred years old that has been used. The interior wallpaper of the house has required gentle cleaning with saliva – yes the digestive type! Unlike chemicals its cleansing qualities are sympathetic to the delicate paper surface, removing the grime and dirt but not the historic paper and ink. Some minor structural repairs were also undertaken on both the house and the tiny furniture. Specialist textile conservators (at our studios at Hampton Court Palace) have also been caring for the fabrics which include a mini state bed (complete with multiple mattresses, individual sheets, pillows and cases, and canopy with curtains), a rug and upholstered chairs.
- The dolls' house is displayed in the King's Breakfast room on the ground floor of the palace.