

Factsheet

Kew Palace History

The house that was to become Kew Palace was built in 1631 for Samuel Fortrey, a French-born Flemish merchant. Fortrey created an expensive and sumptuous home that was extravagantly decorated with strapwork, magnificent moulded plasterwork and detailed paint schemes. Originally known as the Dutch House, due to its architectural style, the building later became the family country home of George III and Queen Charlotte in early 1800. The palace is all that remains of a group of buildings that comprised the royal residences of both George II and III at Kew and Richmond. It also became one of the places where the latter King convalesced during his notorious illness.

Royal associations with the building began in 1728 when the house was leased by Queen Caroline to be used for accommodation for the three elder daughters of George II; Anne, Princess Royal and Princesses Amelia and Caroline. Their brother, Frederick, Prince of Wales arrived in England in 1731 and acquired the lease of the White House, a large residence opposite Kew Palace (since demolished), and employed William Kent to remodel it. Kent was probably also responsible for improvements made to the interior of Kew Palace as well, including new stone chimneypieces. The small palace was also put to use as a school room with the future George III and his brother Edward (later Duke of York) educated there.

The succession of George III in 1760 and his marriage in 1761 to Princess Charlotte of Mecklenberg-Strelitz established the residence of the royal couple at Richmond Lodge while George's mother, Augusta, continued to live nearby at the White House. The size of George III's and Queen Charlotte's rapidly growing family (fifteen children were born from 1762 to 1783) no doubt created something of a crisis for nursery accommodation while the family were at Richmond and Kew Palace was used to isolate the younger princes when they developed whooping cough in 1764. In 1772 the Prince of Wales and his younger brother, Frederick,

Duke of York had the use of the palace, with their governors, as their father had done before them.

Kew took on more of a secondary role to other royal residences in the 1780s with more time spent at Windsor and Weymouth. However, in November 1788 George III was brought to Kew from Windsor suffering from his first episode of illness, staying at the White House while the members of his household lived in Kew Palace. It set an irregular pattern of residence by George in one or other of the two houses. In 1801 Kew Palace was his sanatorium while his family lived separately in the White House.

In 1802 the White House, in a state of disrepair, was partially demolished. Work on a new Castellated Palace (located to the East of Kew Palace) designed by James Wyatt was underway and some of the Royal family temporarily took up residence at Kew Palace whilst the new palace was completed. Evidence from surviving accounts and records tell us that, despite the temporary nature of the arrangements, Kew Palace was supplied with smart, fashionable furniture and upholstery, wallpaper and fitted carpets in the early 19th Century. These accounts have given us invaluable information on the appearance of the rooms at Kew, particularly those on the first floor. Visits and short stays were made by many members of the family including Queen Charlotte, who spent her last months at Kew.

It was during this final stay that Queen Charlotte, aware there was no legitimate heir to the throne beyond her own children, organized a hasty marriage ceremony for two of her sons: the Duke of Clarence, who married Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, and the Duke of Kent, who wed Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg (their daughter later became Queen Victoria). This double royal wedding, held in July 1818 in the Queen's Drawing Room, was to be Kew Palace's last major role in royal history.

The death of Queen Charlotte in her bedchamber at Kew on 17th of November 1818 brought to an end 90 years of royal residence at Kew Palace. The Queen's goods were removed or sold and a housekeeper was left in residence in the

emptied house. The Castellated Palace was never completed since it had been virtually abandoned in 1806 and it was blown-up with gunpowder in 1827. In 1840 the majority of the gardens and park were transferred by the Lord Steward's Department to the office of Woods and Forests.

Kew Palace (as it came to be known) was opened to visitors in 1898 by Queen Victoria.