

Kensington Palace:

The King's State Apartments



Historic Royal Palaces
Kensington Palace

In these rooms you can explore the story of the Georgians at Kensington Palace: George I, George II and Queen Caroline.

The King's State Apartments are surprisingly empty because, unlike domestic rooms, they were used for audiences and meetings. Courtiers and visitors stood in the presence of royalty so there was no need for the sort of furniture you normally find in a home.

The route

The exact layout of the route may change through the year. Look for the printed panels in wooden frames to identify the room. For a more detailed list of paintings look for the printed room guides or speak to one of the uniformed Explainers.



The King's Grand Staircase

This stunning staircase was painted by William Kent in 1724 and features paintings of real people who attended the court of King George I. This was the grand route that all the great and the good of Georgian London would have taken if they wanted to visit the King. It was meant to impress and intimidate visitors.

Don't miss:

William Kent (1685–1748) is located in the centre of the ceiling, wearing a brown turban. He was a man of many talents. As well as architect, interior designer and painter, he was also an innovative designer of furniture and gardens. Kent was introduced to George I just as the King was embarking on an ambitious plan to rebuild Kensington Palace's King's State Apartments. By his side, Kent painted his mistress, actress Elizabeth Butler, whispering in his ear!

Look at the clothes each of the characters are wearing. The clothing and costume of the people depicted reflects the fashions of the time. This painting serves to intimidate visitors and demonstrate the dress-code for court.



The King's Gallery

This is the largest room in Kensington Palace. It houses beautiful works of art from the Royal Collection. The largest and longest of all the rooms in the King's State Apartments, the King's Gallery looks pretty much the same as it was when decorated for George I in 1727. William Kent had the walls hung with crimson silk damask a very expensive fabric, which can be seen throughout the King's State Apartments.

Don't miss:

The Wind Dial, Robert Modern, 1694. An anemoscope is a device invented to show the direction of the wind, or to foretell a change of wind direction or weather. The dial is painted with figurative scenes depicting the continents and, in the centre, a circular map of northwest Europe. The pointer is connected by means of chains and pulleys to a wind vane on the roof. The dial was made for William III. He could determine from the dial the way the wind was blowing, where his navy was likely to be heading and when the posts were likely to arrive. The outer frame and pediment superstructure date from William Kent's redecoration of the Gallery in 1725 for George I.

Queen Caroline's Closet

This is a small room has been many things over the years, but in the 18th century Queen Caroline turned it into a small gallery to display a range of art, including sketches by the great Tudor artist Hans Holbein. Today you can see two of these sketches and a display of miniature portraits from the Georgian period relating to Queen Caroline.

These paintings demonstrate the richness of the fabrics and the design of the clothes. The silhouettes for royalty were carefully designed to display their wealth and power. Note their poses, it was fashionable for men to be dancers and wear big wigs.



The King's Drawing Room

This room is where courtiers would have come in search of power and patronage. They would spend their time gambling and gossiping. Visitors can also see George II's favourite painting 'Venus and Cupid' by Vasari, hanging on the wall. Queen Caroline tried to have the painting moved while her husband was away in Hanover, but when he returned he furiously insisted it be put back. It was promptly returned and continues to hang there today.

The Council Chamber

This is where monarchs would meet with their advisors, members of the Privy Council, to discuss government business. This room is now being used to display the types of fashion dress that people in the Georgian Court would have worn at Kensington Palace.

Don't miss:

The court outfits on display are made from a material called Tyvek. If you look closely you can see the level of detail in the outfits, the pleating, stitching and embellishments.

The ceiling painting by William Kent. Kent was paid £500 to paint the ceiling of the King's Drawing Room between 1722 and 1723. He took inspiration from Ovid's Metamorphoses. In the central panel, Jupiter, King of the Olympian gods, appears to his lover Semele. The imagery of grapes, wine and vine leaves that surround them reference the room's function as a space for lavish entertainment.

Don't miss:

Genuine examples of historic court dress including a mantua.



The Cupola Room

This is one of the most spectacular rooms in the palace. William Kent tried to create the look of a baroque Roman palace. The huge star of the Order of the Garter, the oldest English order of chivalry, was placed in the centre of the ceiling to send the message that even though he was German, King George I was the rightful British monarch!

Don't miss:

The ceiling is an optical illusion - it looks like a high dome, but in fact from roughly where the white feathers are painted in each corner, it is flat!

The Temple of the Four Grand Monarchies, Charles Clay 1730-43. This clock was created by Charles Clay and completed by John Pyke after his death. It is exquisitely decorated. Jacopo Amigoni painted the clockface, John Rysback created the silver reliefs, and Louis Roubiliac made the bronzes representing the Four Grand Monarchies (Assyrian, Persian, Grecian and Roman). The clock originally played music by George Handel, Arcangelo Corelli and Francesco Geminiani.

The Privy Chamber

This is one of the most spectacular rooms in the palace. William Kent tried to create the look of a baroque Roman palace. The huge star of the Order of the Garter, the oldest English order of chivalry, was placed in the centre of the ceiling to send the message that even though he was German, King George I was the rightful British monarch!

Don't miss:

Privy Chamber Ceiling by William Kent painted 1722-3. William Kent painted this ceiling when he completely remodelled these rooms for George I. In the central canvas, Kent depicted Mars, the Roman God of War and Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom. Mars and Minerva were traditionally used to depict the King and Queen. However, at this point George I's former wife was in exile in Germany so this is not very likely.



The Presence Chamber

Visitors would be ushered into this room to be in the presence of the King, or Queen who acted as regent in his absence. He would sit on a throne as people bowed and curtsayed.

Don't miss:

Presence Chamber Ceiling by William Kent painted in 1724. William Kent painted this ceiling in the grotesque style. He was inspired by the decoration in recently-excavated roman houses. In the central scene Apollo, the sun god, drives his chariot through the sky. He is surrounded by sphinxes, urns and garlands.

The Grinling Gibbons overmantle made in 1699 from carved limewood. When William Kent remodelled these rooms, he retained this intricate overmantle, which Grinling Gibbons had completed for William III several decades earlier. Gibbons was a very talented sculptor and wood carver and had been previously employed by both Charles II and James II.
