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Shaping Royal Image through Repurposed Royal Residences in the Late Nineteenth Century: Queen Victoria's Museum at Kensington Palace

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On Queen Victoria's eightieth birthday, 24 May 1899, the State Apartments at Kensington Palace, the Queen's childhood home, opened to public visitors. As the nineteenth century drew towards its end, and aware of her own mortality, the restoration of the palace and the representation of the State Apartments provided an opportunity for the Queen, as a proactive curator, to construct a visual narrative of her reign and signal the relationship she sought between monarch and subject within spaces redolent with and conditioned by her life narrative. With the Queen's encouragement, and under the aegis of Liberal politician and courtier Lord Esher, paintings and other artefacts were gathered to position her within the royal lineage and international dynastic networks. They celebrate her reign as the culmination of nineteenth-century British imperial ambition, and reflect and recast her personal history. The nature of the re-presentation of the State Apartments at Kensington Palace and the impact they had on early visitors is compared to the visitor experience at Osborne House, another royal home closely associated with the Queen's history, which opened to public visitors following a state-managed restoration shortly after the Queen's death.

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On 24 May 1819 Queen Victoria was born at Kensington Palace in London. The circumstances surrounding the event verged on the chaotic: Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, and his new bride Victoire of Saxe-Leiningen had travelled precipitously from Amorbach in Germany to arrive at the palace just a month before the birth of their first child. Building works within the apartments on the ground and first floors, allocated to the duke in 1798, had progressed slowly after the duke's debts required his retreat to Brussels, and it was only with considerable effort that the rooms were made warm and comfortable for their arrival. The christening of the little princess, which took place in the Cupola Room in the State Apartments two weeks after her birth, was blighted by the animosity which had long persisted between the duke and his eldest brother George, then Prince Regent, and this had led to an argument over the child's names. Within a year the duke had died, leaving the duchess precariously financially dependent on her brother-in-law, now King George IV, via a parliamentary grant intended to supplement the modest allowance she received from her brother, Leopold of Saxe-Gotha, King of the Belgians.

In her later years, Victoria retained ambivalent feelings towards her childhood home. She referred to it both as the 'poor old palace' and as 'my dear old Home'. This may reflect her often difficult relationship with her mother during her earliest years spent there, and her intense dislike of her mother's comptroller, Sir John Conroy, which brought memories of 'painful and disagreeable scenes', although this was balanced by happy times in the company of her half-sister, Feodora of Saxe-Leiningen, and attending 'pleasant balls and delicious concerts'.[1] On her accession on 22 June 1837 she had little desire to linger there and within two weeks had moved out to Buckingham Palace.

On 15 May 1899, aged seventy-nine, Queen Victoria returned to Kensington Palace and toured the State Apartments, including some of the rooms she had used as a child. They would be opened to public visitors on 24 May, the Queen's birthday. This article will chronicle and interrogate the series of decisions which led to the establishment of public access, and assess how far, and in what ways, Victoria herself was complicit in the project. It will explore how the site was laid out to celebrate, as well as commemorate, the Queen, her family, her dynasty, and the era with which she had become synonymous.

Victoria's reasons for supporting and promoting this project were pragmatic. The palace continued to serve a useful function as accommodation for family members

[1] Windsor, Royal Archives, *Queen Victoria's Journal* (QVJ), RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1837, 13 July 1837; RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1893, 28 June 1893. *Queen Victoria's Journal* can be accessed online at <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org>.

and senior courtiers, and officials within the royal household were charged to protect this royal interest. Unused as a principal residence by the monarch since 1760, it had been subdivided into a series of well-appointed, self-contained apartments. It was under this arrangement that Victoria, the only child of the third son of King George III, came to be born in the palace. During her childhood, her uncle Prince Adolphus, Duke of Sussex and his wife Princess Sophia were also residents. In 1867 Victoria's cousin, Princess Mary Adelaide of Cambridge, Duchess of Teck, and her family were granted the apartment used by Victoria in childhood. After the death in 1873 of the Duchess of Inverness, the widow of the Duke of Sussex, her commodious accommodation was allocated to Victoria's daughter Princess Louise and her husband the Marquess of Lorne. This ensured that Victoria continued to visit the palace and she would have been aware that it could also serve well as a home for her youngest and favourite child, Princess Beatrice. Beatrice, aged just four when Prince Albert died, was destined to be her mother's solace and support, and latterly served her as a confidante and secretary. Although with great determination, and with the support of her siblings, she convinced her mother that she should be allowed to marry Prince Henry of Battenburg in 1885, she was required to remain with the Queen, rather than maintain an independent household for her family. However, as Victoria's health began to fail, even she realized that plans for Beatrice's future accommodation must be made.

Maintaining the palace was expensive. By the late nineteenth century the sewers were in a dire state and there was a desire to replace gas lighting with electricity. The projected costs for this were considerable however, and there was no appetite within the Treasury to increase the parliamentary grant which underpinned Office of Works projects. Given public disgruntlement at the principle of rent-free accommodation for a favoured few, it had already been suggested that it would be cheaper to move the residents to more modest homes, and as early as 1846 there was parliamentary agitation led by the radical MP Joseph Hume to have the building pulled down.[2] This idea was not widely supported, but the resentment about increasing the parliamentary grant to fund a substantial modernizing of the palace remained, especially as Charles Conybeare, MP for Camborne, articulated, 'I do not believe I have ever been able to gain admission there, because the whole of it is practically devoted to the Royal and

[2] 'Supply — Buckingham Palace', Parl. Debs. (series 1) vol. 88, cols 726–33 (14 August 1846). Available online via <https://hansard.parliament.uk>.

aristocratic lodgers.'[3] In 1888 Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, was still suggesting that all such worries would be solved if the palace was sold off.[4]

However, an alternative proposal developed concurrently, which addressed Conybeare's concern for public access, which was that the building be refitted to accommodate a national gallery of art. The idea had first been advanced by Hume in 1847 and was debated throughout the 1850s. A proposed donation of £10,000 in 1889, later established to have been from Sir Henry Tate, to support such an ambition sparked a correspondence between Sir Henry Ponsonby, Victoria's Private Secretary, the Office of Works, and the curator and collector Sir John Charles Robinson.[5] They were encouraged in pursuing this plan by the knowledge that from 1848 Prince Albert had used part of the State Apartments for the display of the Wallerstein Collection of early Italian, German, and Flemish painting, allowing ticketed access to a limited elite audience.[6] Other parts of the palace were commandeered from 1851 as accommodation for sappers and engineers supporting the installation and deinstallation of the Great Exhibition, and subsequently as an emergency store for the large number of exhibits that had been consigned by their exhibitors with a view to making a legacy collection. But in both cases royal enthusiasm for the plans had been reluctant. Prince Albert would not allow public access to the Great Exhibition exhibits while they were housed at Kensington Palace, and in 1857 Henry Cole, the Great Exhibition's co-organizer, had the 'Trade Collection' moved to the new South Kensington Museum.[7] After the Prince Consort's death, Victoria dispersed the Wallerstein Collection too, allocating twenty-five of the best works to the National Gallery in 1863 and absorbing the rest into the Royal Collection.[8] She had set herself 'quite against the selection of the site for the British

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[3] 'Consolidated Fund (No. 1) Bill', Parl. Debs. (series 3) vol. 334, col. 869 (26 March 1889); with contemporary commentary in 'Essence of Parliament', *Punch*, 12 April 1890, pp. 178–79.

[4] Windsor, Royal Archives, Letter from Lord Ponsonby to Queen Victoria, 24 February 1888, RA L24.

[5] Windsor, Royal Archives, Letter (copy) Sir Henry Tate to Sir J. C. Robinson, 18 July 1889, RA PPTO/PP/HH/MAIN/OS/1317. For a longer discussion of the building history of Kensington Palace in the later nineteenth century, see Lee Prosser and Deirdre Murphy, 'Neglect and Restoration: The State Apartments and Gardens 1760–1899', in *Kensington Palace: Art, Architecture and Society*, ed. by Olivia Fryman (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art; New Haven: Yale University Press in association with Historic Royal Palaces, 2018), pp. 253–77. I also acknowledge with gratitude research (unpublished) undertaken 1990–95 by Caroline Knight into the nineteenth-century history of Kensington Palace.

[6] Prince Albert had acquired the collection from his kinsman Prince Ludwig von Oettingen-Wallerstein (1791–1870). In return for providing surety for a loan, Prince Albert was given a collection of German, Italian, and Flemish paintings. When the loan fell through, Prince Albert acquired all the works.

[7] 'The South Kensington Museum', *Illustrated London News*, 27 June 1857, p. 636.

[8] Oliver Millar, *The Queen's Pictures* (London: Chancellor Press, 1977), p. 193.

Picture Gallery', reported Ponsonby to Tate and Robinson.[9] Perhaps she was mindful of the concern expressed by Prince Albert 'lest the Public shd become enamoured of the Palace & wish to keep it, & my poor Children would be turned into the Streets'.[10]

The ongoing discussion of options for the future of the palace was given a renewed impetus in 1887 when Victoria's Golden Jubilee was celebrated and there was a surge in popular interest in the site, as newspapers, journals, and other publications encouraged an appraisal of Victoria's life and mapped this against the achievements of nation and empire over the fifty years of her reign. Celebratory imagery accompanying such accounts frequently juxtaposed engravings of the Queen as a child with her contemporary portrait. The painter Henry Tanworth Wells (1828–1903), inspired by the fanciful description in the diary of Miss Frances Williams Wynn of the moment at Kensington Palace when Victoria was informed that she was queen, had already exhibited a painting of the event at the Royal Academy in 1880.[11] With the palace as backdrop, sentimental images of Victoria and her mother, such as that produced by Nicholas Culpeper and William Fowler, circulated widely (*Fig. 1*).

The local community in Kensington had long taken pride in their association with their former famous resident. To mark Victoria's jubilee in 1887, they commissioned a statue of the Queen from her artist daughter Princess Louise, then occupying an apartment in the palace. The inspiration for the work was Sir George Hayter's painted portrait (1838–40) of the Queen in her coronation robes. With great interest, Victoria visited Louise's studio in Kensington Palace Gardens to follow the progress of work on the maquettes.[12] On 28 June 1893 she returned to unveil the finished work which had been installed near the Round Pond in the gardens, framed by the garden facade of the palace. Her address to the large crowd that had gathered contained an acknowledgement that the association between her history and that of the palace was strong, enduring, and important to her:

> I thank you sincerely for this loyal address, & for the kind wish to commemorate my Jubilee by the erection of a statue of myself on the spot where I was born & lived till my accession. It is a great pleasure to me to be here on this occasion in my dear

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[9] Windsor, Royal Archives, Household Papers, vol. 14, no. 1364, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1899, 15 May 1899.

[10] London, National Art Library, Cole's Diaries, 1 March 1852, NAL 45.C.114.

[11] [Frances Williams Wynn], *Diaries of a Lady of Quality from 1797 to 1844*, ed. by A. Hayward (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1864), pp. 281–82; Henry Tanworth Wells, *Victoria Regina*, 1880, oil paint on canvas, Tate, London, N01919.

[12] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1890, 8 July 1890.

Fig. 1: Queen Victoria when a child, 1887–97, chromolithograph illustration after Nicholas Culpeper and William Fowler, British Museum, 1902,1011.8520. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

old Home, & to witness the unveiling of this fine statue so admirably designed & executed by my beloved Daughter.[13]

[13] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1893, 28 June 1893.

But as the jubilee drew commentators to the palace, her childhood home received new scrutiny in a flurry of publications.[14] Charles Eyre Pascoe wrote, in 1888:

> As to the contents of these royal apartments today, why, we could not write anything on this subject if we wished. They are empty — empty, bare, dreary, and comfortless; no carpets, no curtains, no furniture of any kind [...], nothing but bare walls and bare boards.[15]

Other authors added to the debate. The *Graphic* in 1893 published an engraving of the Queen's Apartments wing shored up that revealed to the widest audience the extremely parlous state of its fabric.[16] It is evident that Victoria too was drawn into this reappraisal. As her faculties began slowly to fail, her allying of the image of her younger, prettier, and more vigorous self with her ageing form could have advantage. The great popular success of *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* and *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands*, published in 1868 and 1884 respectively, which drew on the Queen's diaries extending back to her early married years, might be cited as evidence of this.[17] The Queen seems to have become aware that Kensington had the potential to serve her well in a similar way. When visiting the palace in 1860 she noted how she had 'looked up at the windows of my old rooms, now so deserted, & which contain the whole history of my childhood!'.[18] However, by the 1880s she was also aware of its present dilapidated state.

Within the exchange of memoranda between J. C. Robinson and Henry Ponsonby, emboldened by Tate's potential gift of funds, a plan began to find royal favour. This proposed that the State Apartments and rooms within the palace Victoria had used as a child should be made publicly accessible. Rather than it serving as a national gallery, this element was encompassed within a greater ambition for the

> formation of a collection of works of art illustrative of the monarchy from the end of the seventeenth century to be placed therein [...]. The history of the Monarchy and its relations with the life of the Country in general, commencing with the period when Kensington Palace was built, or at the change of the government in 1688, could be

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[14] For example, W. J. Loftie, *Kensington Palace* (London: Farmer, 1898).

[15] C. E. Pascoe, 'The Queen's Homes, Kensington Palace', *Leisure Hour*, February 1888, pp. 115–23 (pp. 116–17).

[16] H. W. Brewer, 'Kensington Palace', *Graphic*, 1 July 1893, p. 22.

[17] [Queen Victoria], *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands, from 1848 to 1861*, ed. by Arthur Helps (London: Smith, Elder, 1868); [Queen Victoria], *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands, from 1862 to 1882* (London: Smith, Elder, 1884).

[18] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1860, 18 June 1860.

> illustrated with paintings and other works of art in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court Palace, and a few new purchases would help tell an even more complete tale.[19]

It was stated clearly that the reign of Queen Victoria would be presented within the visual narrative in more detail than the rest: 'it could include illustrations of events which render it so memorable [...] for the information of future ages, & for the gratification of Her Majesty's subjects, in all parts of her dominions at the present time.'[20] When the Lord Chamberlain's Office pointed out that obtaining public funds to support this ambition could be difficult, Queen Victoria herself stepped in and proposed that she purchase the palace with her private funds and then restore the building to put it to better use. Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, asked the First Commissioner of Works to check the feasibility of the Queen's offer. The appraisal immediately revealed its impracticality, and that the costs of purchasing the land, buying out the interests of existing residents, and funding the restoration would be prohibitive.[21]

However, the Queen's enthusiasm for the venture precipitated a new round of discussions between Lord Salisbury; Aretas Akers-Douglas, later Viscount Chilston, First Commissioner in the Office of Works; and Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher, Secretary to the Office of Works. A solution emerged which satisfied Victoria's desire to protect her birthplace and the personal, indeed national, history it represented, and to preserve a family interest in the site. It was also a plan which was suitably cost efficient, while preventing criticism of the government which had allowed a building so entangled with the national narrative to get into such disorder. In April 1897, shortly before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee commemoration, it was settled that several Crown properties, including the Ranger's House at Greenwich, Kew Palace within the Royal Botanic Garden, and the State Apartments at Kensington Palace would be opened to visitors.[22] While this might be read as a generous concession from the Queen, she also benefited from the provision of accommodation for her younger daughters. Esher and his colleagues were heartened to find their plan backed by the Treasury who allocated up to £20,000 in its support.[23] On 1 April 1897 the House of Commons voted that the

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[19] Windsor, Royal Archives, J. C. Robinson to Henry Ponsonby. Memoranda on the suggested utilization of the unoccupied State Rooms at Kensington Palace, and the formation of a collection of works of art in illustration of the Monarchy from the end of the seventeenth century to be placed therein, undated, poss. 1889, RA PPTO/PP/HH/MAIN/OS/1318.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Household Papers, vol. 17, no. 1664.

[22] Initialled letter probably from Lord Esher to 'F. C.', 23 April 1897, quoted in *Kensington Palace*, ed. by Fryman, p. 262.

[23] Kew, The National Archives (TNA), Private letter from Lord Esher to Arthur Bigge, Lord Stamfordham, 20 July 1897, TNA WORK 19/222.

work should go ahead.[24] Victoria had already signalled her consent and she was eager for the work to commence:

> Her Majesty desires that the State Rooms of Kensington Palace, which have been unoccupied since October 1760, should be put into proper repair, and returned as nearly as possible to their former condition, with a view to their being opened to the Public during Her Majesty's pleasure.[25]

To oversee the practical detail, the Queen appointed a committee comprising Sir Spencer Ponsonby Fane, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, Charles Robinson, Ernest Law, and Esher. She was greatly interested in their discussions and would review and authorize their proposals. Her diary contains notes of the numerous occasions on which the committee members were invited to lunch or dinner.

On close inspection the State Apartments were found in a very poor state structurally and decoratively. *The Times* reported in 1898 that 'painted ceilings are thick with dirt and cobwebs, woodwork is worm-eaten, rich cornices are crumbling, doors broken, and rubbish piled up in the corners'.[26] A condition of the £20,000 parliamentary grant was that the money must be spent by the end of the financial year 1897, and in order to achieve this the work was subcontracted to Mowlem, a commercial builder, and Bertram, a company of interior decorators. Work began immediately. At a press call held following this announcement, it was made clear that the building remained a royal palace and was not to be seen as 'a public building handed over for the perpetual enjoyment of the public, like the National Gallery', and this caveat conditioned the restoration philosophy.[27] The 1899 guidebook to Kensington Palace, written by Ernest Law, an expert in Tudor history who was also official historian to Hampton Court Palace, describes the approach adopted:

> The most studied care has been taken never to renew any decoration where it was possible to preserve it — least of all ever to 'improve' old work into new. On the contrary, repairing, patching, mending, piecing, cleaning have been the main occupations of the decorators, to an extent that would render some impatient, slapdash builders and surveyors frantic.[28]

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[24] TNA, Minute initialled R. B. B. [Reginald Brett], 4 December 1897, TNA WORK 19/222.

[25] TNA, Works to Lord Chamberlain's Office in miscellaneous records relating to the palace and grounds adjoining, 1806–99, TNA WORK 19/16/1, fol. 739.

[26] 'Kensington Palace', *The Times*, 28 January 1898, p. 6.

[27] TNA, Miscellaneous records relating to the palace and grounds adjoining, 1806–99, TNA WORK 19/16/1 fol. 744.

[28] Ernest Law, *Kensington Palace: The Birthplace of the Queen* (London: Bell, 1899), p. 42.

It is still evident that great care was taken with many aspects of the work: Grinling Gibbons's wood carvings in the Presence Chamber and Queen's Gallery were reconstructed sensitively, and William Kent's decoration of the Cupola Room and the King's Staircase was cleaned gently. However, a misreading of Kent's additions to seventeenth-century fabric meant that in other places his work was stripped back, while textile wallcoverings that proved impossible to salvage were replaced with wallpaper.

Once the State Apartments were in better order, a picture hang was designed to set up a narrative for visitors. Furniture was only sparsely introduced into the spaces — the message was carried in the choice of paintings, and indeed the architectural bones of the building, which provided evidence of use by many previous generations of royal occupants. The Queen took a keen interest in the design of the display programme, approving the guiding principles which stated that

> any pictures which were known to have been formerly at Kensington Palace would be restored to their original positions, unless there is any good reason to the contrary, and secondly that the pictures to be collected at Kensington should as far as possible be connected with the reigns of those sovereigns who since King William III have been connected to the Palace.[29]

She added a complicating caveat that in gathering the paintings together she wished 'nothing should be done to despoil the other palaces', especially Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace.[30] The picture hangs at Windsor and Buckingham Palace had been settled by the Prince Consort, and she 'desires that there shall be no change'.[31]

The Queen's interest continued as the paintings were assembled. She usually, but not always, approved the suggested removals from Hampton Court Palace, the location from which the majority were sourced. Her decisions seem grounded in concern that the new arrangements at Kensington should adhere to the display philosophy established, rather than that the relocation of artworks be used to resolve conservation concerns at Hampton Court. The display conditions there were not regarded highly by members of the royal family. Queen Victoria's daughter, Vicky, Crown Princess of Prussia, stated in 1879 that

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[29] Windsor, Royal Archives, Memorandum, Lord Esher to Queen Victoria, 21 January 1899, RA PPTO/PP/HH/MAIN/OS/1622.

[30] TNA, Lord Esher to Sir Spencer Ponsonby Fane, 12 October 1898, TNA WORK 19/220.

[31] TNA, Lord Esher to Sir Spencer Ponsonby Fane, 26 January 1899, TNA WORK 19/220.

> the pictures at Hampton Court are not cared for as they should be. Dozens are misnamed, the good and the bad are muddled together many in dark rooms where one cannot see them properly [...]. The Hampton Court Gallery needs fresh varnish and fresh frames for some of the pictures.[32]

Ponsonby Fane, writing to Esher about Robinson's and Law's initial choices, remarked that 'amongst them are several Pictures which have no reference whatever to Kensington and no historical interest of any kind' and a more discriminating selection was requested.[33] The paintings taken from Hampton Court eventually included the series of portraits of admirals that had hung in the Queen's Apartments during the reign of Queen Anne which were returned with other marine paintings to make a display in the King's Gallery. A portrait of Frederick the Great by Antoine Pesne that had once hung in the Privy Chamber was returned to that location, and a collection of full-length portraits of monarchs and their consorts from 1688 to the early nineteenth century was selected for the Queen's Gallery.[34]

The collection was supplemented from other sources. As early as July 1898 Esher wrote to Lionel Cust, director of the National Portrait Gallery, asking for the loan of 'any duplicates or other portraits which might appear suitable to the new galleries at Kensington Palace, from historical or other associations'.[35] The trustees considered the request and offered as a gift 'a scene from the Coronation of Queen Victoria, a sketch in oils by Camille Roqueplan, one of the artists specially sent over by Louis Philippe of France to make sketches of this occasion', as well as the loan of five other paintings.[36] The particular care taken to construct a dynastic series of monarchs since the Glorious Revolution required some works to be retrieved reluctantly from Windsor Castle when the subject was not represented in the collection at Hampton Court. Queen Victoria was far more open to the idea that works from protected picture hangs be copied. For example, in 1899 she 'suggested that the Picture of Her Majesty in the Corridor at Windsor might be copied to fill the space over the chimney in the Council Chamber'.[37]

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[32] *Beloved Mama: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the German Crown Princess 1878–1885*, ed. by Roger Fulford (London: Evans Brothers, 1981), p. 59.

[33] TNA, Letter from Sir Spencer Ponsonby Fane to Lord Esher, 4 February 1899, TNA WORK 19/222.

[34] Windsor, Royal Archives, Pictures at Hampton Court proposed to be moved to Kensington Palace, RA PP/HH/MAIN/OS/1622; TNA, Material on paintings to be removed from Hampton Court, 1898, TNA WORK 19/220; List [...] of pictures removed [...], 1899, TNA WORK 19/220.

[35] TNA, Letter from Leonard Cust to Lord Esher, 29 July 1898, TNA WORK 19/220.

[36] Sir Joshua Reynolds, attrib., *William Pulteney, Earl of Bath*; Jan van Wyck, *John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough*; G. F. Joseph, *Rt. Hon. Spencer Perceval, a Posthumous Portrait*; Jonathan Richardson, *Matthew Prior*; and Peter Angelis, *Installation of Knights of the Garter at Kensington Palace by Queen Anne on August 4th, 1713.*

[37] Household Papers, vol. 17, no. 1629, Letter dated 18 July 1899. When it was found to be too small, Esher suggested 'a

Ernest Law's guidebook to the palace provides useful evidence that there was a conscious dramaturgy set up for the palace visitor, as the public route took visitors from the Queen's entrance at the north-east corner of the palace through the Queen's Apartments hung with portraits of Victoria's royal predecessors back to King William III, when the palace had first been purchased for the Crown.

Entering the King's Apartments and arriving in the Presence Chamber at the end of the long enfilade, visitors were then presented with a dense hang of copies of ceremonial paintings of Victoria, and others recording occasions that had punctuated her reign (*Fig. 2*). It included copies of Sir George Hayter's portrait of Victoria in her coronation robes, and C. R. Leslie's *Coronation of the Queen in Westminster Abbey, June 28th 1838: Her Majesty Taking the Sacrament*. There was also a collection of works that celebrated Victoria's family — the series heralded with Hayter's *Marriage of the Queen and Prince Albert at the Chapel Royal, St James's 10 February 1840*, and continuing with Hayter's and Leslie's record of the christenings of the Princess Royal and the Prince of Wales, concluded with copy images of their weddings by John Phillip and William Frith.

Fig. 2: 'The Presence Chamber, Kensington Palace', photograph by Reinhold Thiele & Co, illustrated in 'Kensington Palace', *Graphic*, 27 May 1899.

copy of the picture at Hatfield House' and sent the Queen an engraving of it for her approval.

The placing of this display was pivotal to the narrative and satisfied the early stated ambition that Victoria's history was to be especially drawn out and celebrated.

It is revealing that there was not a single original work in the Presence Chamber arrangement: it was evidently considered so important to set up this element of the narrative that procuring and exhibiting copies was considered appropriate, and the cost of this justified. From 1891 a series of royal commissions was given to an artist or artists, probably including Henry Jamyn Brooks, to make the works exhibited in the Presence Chamber, indicating that there was considerable planning as well as expense involved. Jamyn Brooks (1839–1925) was an able artist and noted copyist working from Trafalgar Studios in the King's Road, London. He specialized in recording ceremonial occasions, and other events, and received commissions from many civic authorities and learned societies to record their personnel, as well as undertaking other commissions for Queen Victoria in the 1890s.[38] This decision to make copies also suggests that the original works were deemed too important to be removed from their current locations, principally at Windsor, more regularly used for state functions and royal family gatherings. For the tourist experience it can be argued that a lesson in history rather than art history was intended and therefore the presence of original works was less important than the events or people depicted in them.

The three rooms that Victoria had used regularly as a child marked the culmination of the public tour. In Law's guidebook his dry lists of pictures give way in the description of these rooms to more lyrical prose and first-hand recollections of the Queen as a child. He writes:

> It is to the three small, plain and simple rooms, with their contents [...], that all visitors to the Palace will turn with the liveliest interest, and with the keenest, the most thrilling emotion. Romance, and all the thoughts and feelings of tender, natural affection [...] seem to awaken and revive once more with the child born in this Palace eighty years ago. (p. 45)

There was no attempt to recreate their appearance at the time they were used by the infant princess. The walls were papered with a simple domestic flower-sprigged pattern and the floors were covered with linoleum (*Fig. 3*). A single large-scale painting — Jamyn Brooks's copy of Sir David Wilkie's *The First Council of Queen Victoria* — hung

[38] Henry Jamyn Brooks after Charles Robert Leslie, *The Christening of Victoria, Princess Royal, 10 February 1841*, 1893–95?, oil on canvas, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 407411; Henry Jamyn Brooks after John Phillip, *The Marriage of Victoria, Princess Royal, with Prince Frederick William of Prussia in the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, 25 January 1858*, 1894, albumen print on paper mount, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 406818.

Fig. 3: Postcard, 'Kensington Palace: The Nursery', 1900, photolithograph. © Historic Royal Palaces.

in the room that had served the princess and her mother as a bedroom, which Law names 'The Nursery'.[39] This painting serves as a case study of an image that made its own journey, weathering personal, political, and aesthetic challenges over the Queen's long life. Initially, Victoria had contrived with the artist to make an image that would herald a new reign and a new vision of the monarchy. Wilkie's papers record how she attended the sittings wearing a white dress, rather than the black outfit she had actually worn during the Accession Council. In the resultant image she appears as a luminous figure within the large gathering of sombrely dressed elderly men — it presents her as the hopeful saviour of the monarchy, so recently discredited by her unpopular uncles, shining with promise for the future. By 1847, however, having lost confidence in the abilities of the artist, she recorded in her diary that 'it was one of the worst paintings I have ever seen, both as to painting & likeness' (Millar, p. 193). But by 1892 it is evident that the work was being appraised once again. For the elderly Queen, this image of her young self at the moment she was thrust into power becomes recharged with a message about personal courage and determination, as well as one of change and hope for the nation over which she would govern. This gave it new value, one deserving of a replica, as Victoria brought about a visual representation of her life. The remaining walls were

[39] Henry Jamyn Brooks, *The First Council of Queen Victoria*, 1891, oil on canvas, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 407146.

hung with small-scale engravings of the young Queen after well-known paintings of her.

The only other physical contents within the three rooms were a small number of showcases containing a modest collection of toys that had once belonged to the young princess. When an inventory of the palace contents had been made in 1862, it was evident that the Duchess of Kent and her daughter had left possessions behind, including some of the princess's toys, on their removal to Buckingham Palace.[40] They were first described for a public audience in Pascoe's article for *Leisure Hour* in 1888. After inveigling his way into the palace, Pascoe recounted:

> There is one room not barred by shutters [...]. It was a room [...] which had served as a nursery. In one corner stood an old doll's house [...]. 'Ah!' said the lady who was kind enough to be our guide, 'that doll's house was the Queen's when she was a child.' (p. 117)

Victoria's childhood relics were celebrated again in 1894 with the publication of Frances Low's beautifully illustrated volume describing her collection of dolls. In 1899 palace visitors were able to view the doll's house, some of Victoria's dolls, a toy phaeton carriage, building blocks, and a solitaire board with glass marbles (*Fig. 4*).

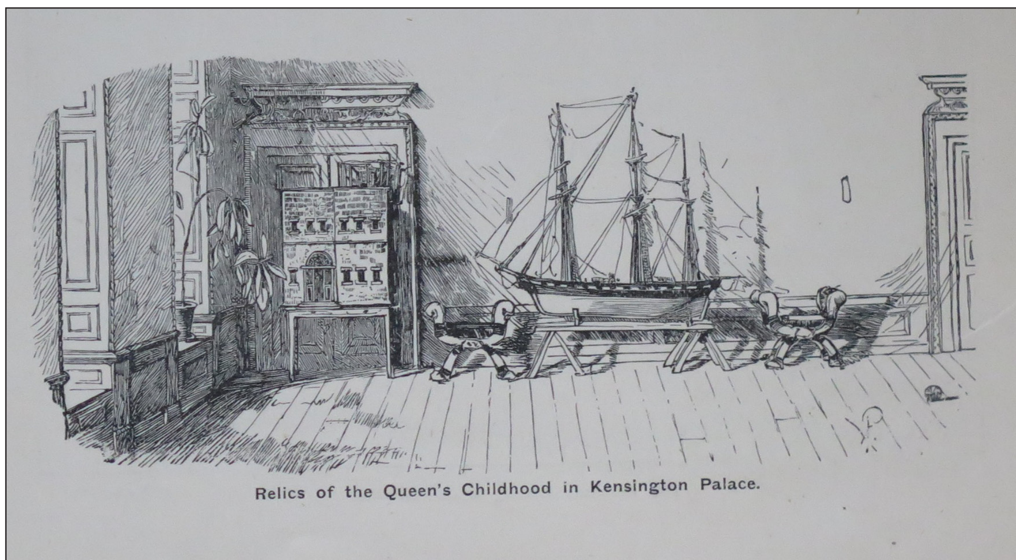

Fig. 4: 'Relics of the Queen's Childhood', engraved illustration from Mrs O. F. Walton, *Our Gracious Queen 1837–1897* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1897), p. 7.

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[40] TNA, Inventory of furniture and sundry articles removed from the Cube Room in the State Apartments, 18 February 1862, TNA WORK 19/16/1/655.

Despite their modest amusements, it was these rooms that were singled out for discussion in press coverage of the public opening of the State Apartments. Law's guidebook acknowledges that the Queen's history was given a new vividness and interest when discussed in the very spot where transformative moments in her life were enacted. He encouraged this emotional, sentimental, and empathetic response from visitors, suggesting that they imagine themselves in her shoes: 'we can imagine the little princess, when she rose in the morning, gazing out over the gardens and the Park beyond, [...] through the mist and smoke of distant London, musing on the destiny waiting for her' (Law, p. 115). The *tabula rasa*, or empty page, approach taken to the presentation and interpretation of the rooms contributed importantly to their success. Visitors brought their own imagination and their personal brushes with royal histories to the experience, which brought for each an individual powerful connection. The simplicity of the presentation allowed the Queen, who was so frail in 1899 that she toured the new displays in a wheelchair, to remain a mysterious, all-powerful, mythic figure in visitors' minds (*Fig. 5*).

Decisions about the furnishing of the Victorian rooms were initiated well before the government-funded restoration of the State Apartments started. In 1895 Ponsonby informed the Office of Works that the Queen wished the rooms to be simply whitewashed, the woodwork cleaned and varnished, and the floor stained.[41] The project may have been a simple tidying up after the departure of the former occupants, the Duke and Duchess of Teck, or indicate royal embarrassment at the poor state of rooms so intimately connected to the Queen's history while suggesting a reluctance to disrupt furnishing schemes in other royal homes, but Victoria was aware of the presentational approaches of other museums. The 'memory museum', or historic house museum, containing a collection of former inhabitants' belongings and objects, was a concept familiar to her. There were many ways in which a narrative could be set up for visitors to experience, some relating to the person or people who had lived there, others reflecting the social role the house may have had, or how it informed the history of a particular locality, social class, or historical period.

In the case of Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, the uniqueness of the house and its collection was acknowledged within its architect-owner's lifetime, and its future as a museum was set up by Act of Parliament in 1833. It opened to a public audience in 1837, on Soane's death, with its collections being the principal attraction.[42] By contrast, the committee that raised the funds to allow Thomas

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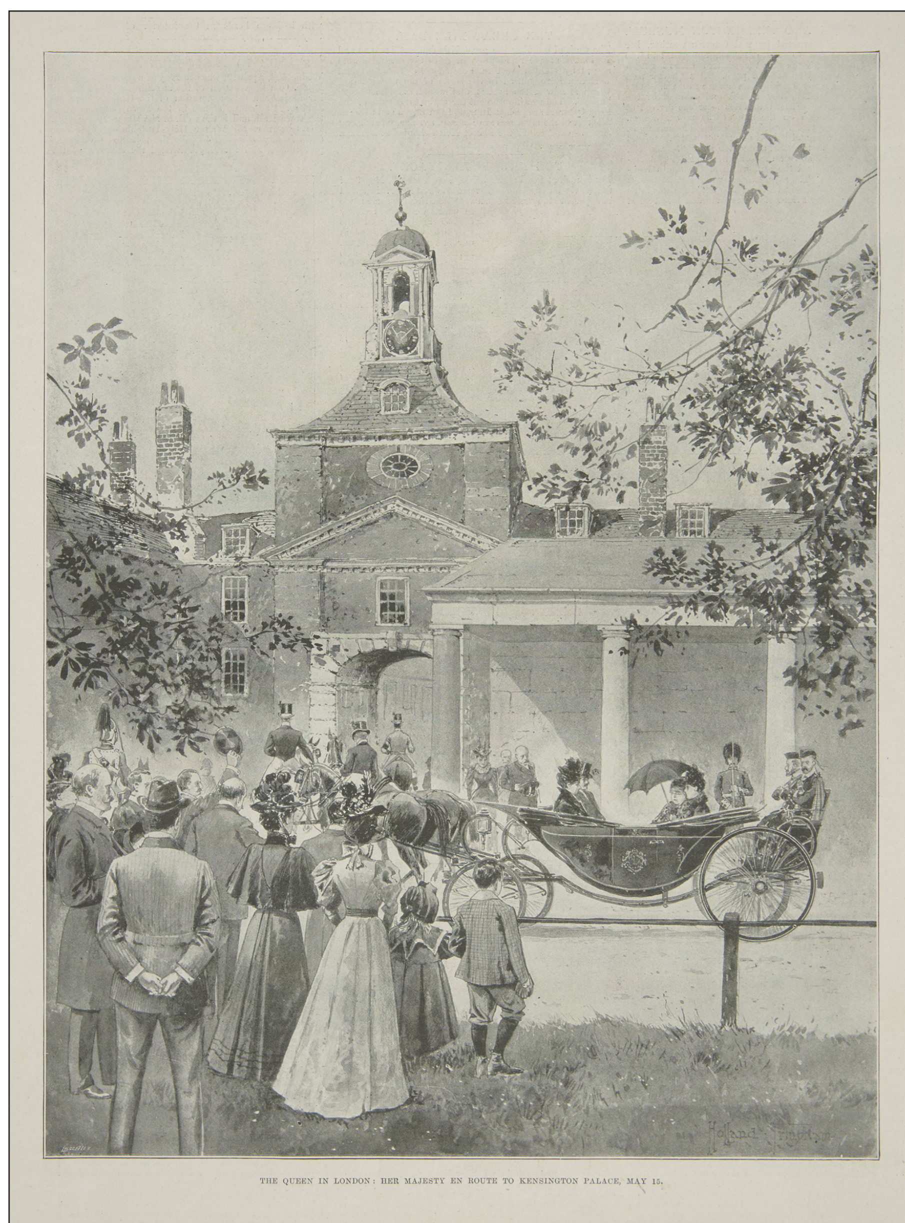
41 TNA, Queen Victoria's rooms and exhibits, 17 June 1895, TNA WORK 19/221.

42 Susan G. Feinberg, 'The Genesis of Sir John Soane's Museum Idea: 1801–1810', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 43 (1984), 225–37.



THE QUEEN IN LONDON: HER MAJESTY EN ROUTE TO KENSINGTON PALACE, MAY 15.

Fig. 5: 'The Queen in London: Her Majesty en route to Kensington Palace, May 15', *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1899. © Historic Royal Palaces.

Carlyle's house, in Chelsea, to be opened to visitors in 1895, fourteen years after the death of the author, saw it 'furnished, as far as possible, with Carlyle's belongings'.[43] Devotees had tracked down many items of furniture owned by Carlyle and his wife Jane,

[43] 'Carlyle's House in Chelsea', *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, 27 July 1895, p. 6. I am indebted to Catriona Wilson for this reference.

as well as many of his books. The presentation was judged very successful, attracting three thousand visitors in the first seven months after its opening.[44] The house provides an illustration of the appeal of relics: 'Some object, which remains as a memorial [...] (often) departed [...] carefully preserved, and held in esteem' (*OED*). While this concept may have been centuries old, there was a new heightened interest in contemporary secular celebrity relics towards the end of the nineteenth century. An early reviewer claimed the 'most interesting room' in Carlyle's former home was the bedroom that contained relics such as Carlyle's top hat, which, while of less monetary value than other artefacts, was valued as being 'most characteristic'.[45]

As a passionate admirer of the literary works of Sir Walter Scott since her girlhood, Queen Victoria had direct knowledge of Scott's house, Abbotsford, located near Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, which had opened as a museum in 1833. Following numerous references in Victoria's autobiographical *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* that attest to her enthusiasm to visit the sites in Scotland that had served as Scott's inspiration, in 1867 she made her pilgrimage to his former home. To her great pleasure, she was shown round by one of Scott's descendants. The manor was set up as a 'castle-in-miniature', with small towers and imitation battlements decorating both house and garden walls. Throughout the site Scott had built in relics and curiosities from other historical structures, such as the doorway of the old Tolbooth in Edinburgh, the remains of Edinburgh's fifteenth-century Mercat Cross, as well as several examples of classical sculpture. However, for the Queen it was the artefacts that related to Scott himself that were of the greatest interest. She records:

> They only showed us the part of the house in which Sir Walter lived. In the Drawing room there is still the same furniture & carpet. In the Library we saw his M. S. of 'Ivanhoe', several others of his Novels & Poems, all written in a beautiful handwriting, with hardly any erasures, & also the relics which Sir Walter had himself collected. His study is a small dark room with a little turret, in which is a bronze bust done from a cast taken after death. There we saw his Journal, into which Mr Hope Scott asked me to write my name, which I thought hardly right. Went through some passages & into 2 or 3 rooms, where were collected fine pieces of old armour, &c & where in a glass case, are preserved Sir Walter's last clothes. We ended by going into the Dining room, in which he dined, where a formal long table, was set out with tea.[46]

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[44] 'Carlyle's Centenary', *Herts and Cambs Reporter & Royston Crow*, 21 February 1896, p. 6.
[45] *Herts and Cambs Reporter & Royston Crow*, 21 February 1896.
[46] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1867, 22 August 1867.

The Queen was well aware, too, of the potency of her own royal family history and that houses associated with this had compelling popular appeal. Even as a child staying at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, her diary account pivots around the romantic history of Mary, Queen of Scots, and her captivity in that house. Her fascination with this sixteenth-century ancestor continued into later years. During her travels in Scotland, she encountered many sites associated with Queen Mary, invariably recording her impressions in her diary and noting the feelings such encounters evoked. These were especially powerful when the site brought opportunity to engage with the material legacy of Mary's life and, in 1872, she wrote compellingly of the powerful experience visiting Mary's rooms at the Palace of Holyroodhouse:

> We drove up to the door of the old gloomy, but most historical palace of Holyrood [...]. Then, conducted by the Keeper, an intelligent man, visited the rooms of Queen Mary, beginning with the Hamilton Apartments, which were L^{d} Darnley's rooms, & going up the old staircase to Queen Mary's chamber [...]. Then went up another little dark winding staircase, at the top of which poor Rizzio was foully murdered, drops of his blood being supposed to have stained the floor & still to be visible. Entered the Presence Chamber, the panels of which date from the time of Queen Mary & on which one can see her initials & arms as well as those of her mother. Here stands the original bed made for Charles I^{rst}, when he came to Holyrood to be crowned King of Scotland, then into poor Queen Mary's bedroom with the old faded bed she used, the baby basket sent her by Queen Elizabeth, when King James I^{rst} was born, & her work box! [...] It is all deeply interesting.[47]

However, none of these buildings commemorated people who were still living, and who thus were still able to generate their own histories or shape those of the people that surrounded them. In the presentation of the State Apartments at Kensington Palace, the Queen would need to address this new challenge. It would be seen as a place of self-commemoration, of her family and dynasty, as well as of her reign. Since her accession, Victoria had had to manage an increasingly 'celebrity' status. She had initially enjoyed the vicarious excitement of endeavouring to travel incognito on family holidays or when undertaking private visits. Later, as new technologies enabled information to circulate about her life and that of her family ever more swiftly and more widely, this aspect of royal life became more tedious and difficult. It was important to manage the risk that the power that resided in the mystique of monarchy could be diluted, even eliminated, by public recording of her private delight in homely family activities. There

[47] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1872, 14 August 1872.

were already commercial visitor attractions such as Madame Tussaud's waxworks that were in the business of celebrating and commercializing celebrity and had constructed tableaux representing Victoria in her coronation robes and at her wedding to Prince Albert. These were so popular that even Victoria and her family had visited them.[48] The new displays at Kensington Palace would need to sit apart from such sensationalism and serve as a political marketing asset to the monarchy.

There had already been other means used by Victoria for self-commemoration. Following her private visit to approve the new arrangements at Kensington Palace, on 15 May 1899 she was driven to South Kensington where she laid the foundation stone of a new building for the South Kensington Museum, which she renamed on this occasion the Victoria and Albert Museum. While commemorating Prince Albert, the new name ensured that her involvement in this venture was marked, as did royal donations to its foundation collections of furniture, ceramics, metalwork, and sculpture (including the monumental cast of Michelangelo's David, a gift she had received from the Grand Duke of Tuscany) and important loans such as the Raphael Cartoons.[49] Such patronage was designed to show the royal family's engagement with the fine and decorative arts, and their impressive connoisseurship, rather than calculated to bring any sense of intimacy or connection with the royal donors. Victoria also peppered the landscape, especially in the environs of the royal homes, with imposing public reminders of the pervasiveness of monarchical authority within the community. Cairns were raised and memorial trees planted to mark family celebrations and as commemoration. However, for a viewing public these monuments were impersonal and only hinted at the private histories they represented.

In the Kensington Palace presentation, with its special connection to the Queen's history, such dispassion would be harder to achieve. Yet through perhaps a rather uncomfortable melange of presentational styles the narrative set up for the visitor within the State Apartments as a whole deliberately and systematically turned this semi-redundant royal residence into a museum of the monarchy since William and Mary. The history of Queen Victoria, then evidently nearing the end of her reign, was positioned as the culmination of a glorious march of progress for the monarchy and the nation, thus following what might be considered a specifically Whig interpretation of history.[50] In the suite of rooms she had used as a child, which was inevitably the most

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[48] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1853, 25 April 1853.

[49] London, V&A Archive, Royal loans, MA/31/2; Plaster cast after Michelangelo, V&A REPRO.1857-161; Raphael Cartoons, V&A MA/2/R1/1–7, MA/2/R2.

[50] Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Bell, 1931).

emotive part of the palace, visitors might be lured in by the display of her toys — relics of a sort — but left even more entranced by the evocation of the royal life course that had played out there, which had shaped the national history and their own.[51] Victoria's story was rendered all the more powerful by the simplicity of the presentational approach in these rooms, which played on the philosophy that 'all human action *takes* and *makes* place. The past is the set of places made by human action. History is a map of these places' and that the experience of this is made the more puissant by being shared.[52] In *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs wrote that

> each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is stable in it.[53]

The public opening of the apartments in 1899 was a massive success with 13,000 visitors attending on the first day, which had been organized to coincide with the Queen's birthday on 24 May.[54] The admission fee was modest and opening hours included weekends, thus ensuring that the working community had an opportunity to visit. Journalists were swift to comment on the display of the Victorian rooms, where a closer, more personal and emotional bond was forged or exploited between the monarch and her subjects than was possible within the wider national narrative created in the other rooms open to the public. They drew out the romantic tale of the little Princess Victoria, whose destiny was once so precarious, from behind the contemporary habitual image of the elderly Queen, dressed opulently if uniformly in black, even though Victoria remained an elusive presence within the presentation of the site, not pinned down by the physicality of her history.[55] While her status left her isolated and sequestered in reality, the Queen herself had been delighted by the success of her autobiographical publications and the new display owed its success at least in part because she had allowed a little more of her personal history to be made accessible to a wide community curious about the elderly woman whose life for many would come to define the era. The

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[51] TNA, Miscellaneous records relating to the palace and grounds adjoining, 1806–99, TNA WORK 19/16/1, fol.744.

[52] Philip J. Ethington, 'Placing the Past: "Groundwork" for a Spatial Theory of History', *Rethinking History*, 11 (2007), 465–93 (p. 465), emphases in original.

[53] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter, Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980) (translated from: *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), pp. 128–31.

[54] 'Sunday at Kensington Palace', *Daily Telegraph and Courier*, 30 May 1899, p. 9.

[55] 'Kensington Palace', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 June 1899, p. 3; 'Kensington Palace', *Graphic*, 27 May 1899, p. 661; 'Kensington Palace', *Morning Post*, 20 May 1899, p. 7.

display also subtly set up the facts of the Queen's long life, part of which was played out in the palace, as a ripping yarn, and the emotional charge caught in this was attuned to late nineteenth-century popular taste. The public access and new displays, however, also saw the beginning of a reappraisal of the architectural and historical value of the palace site as a whole. It encouraged H. W. and H. C. Brewer to conjure up a new elaborately fanciful depiction of an eighteenth-century court occasion when the palace was in its heyday for publication in the *Graphic* (*Fig. 6*); and later, the palace, the setting

Fig. 6: 'Kensington Palace in its Palmy Days: George II and Queen Caroline in the Orangery', H. W. and H. C. Brewer, lithograph, supplement to the *Graphic*, 19 January 1901.

for Queen Victoria's childhood narrative, provided both inspiration and backdrop for works by J. M. Barrie and Arthur Rackham.[56] Victoria appears to have followed the press coverage of the public opening in 1899 with interest, and seems to have been pleased with what had been achieved.[57]

On Victoria's death in January 1901, her son, King Edward VII, moved swiftly to make changes to the presentation of the State Apartments at Kensington Palace to serve both his mother's memory and a new reign. The copies of ceremonial paintings recording key moments in Victoria's life on display in the Presence Chamber were taken down and in 1903 several passed to Lord Curzon in anticipation of the furnishing of the Royal Gallery in the Queen Victoria Memorial in Calcutta.[58] Rather than setting up a new picture hang in celebration of the new regime, the focus of all the displays shifted as the site was used increasingly as a family museum in which Victoria's history continued to be celebrated but was set more firmly into a continuing history of the royal dynasty, thereby allowing the earlier Whig interpretation narrative ambition to be updated and perpetuated. Under Queen Alexandra, and later Queen Mary, artefacts belonging to more recent generations of the family were added to those once owned by earlier generations. The new display established in the Presence Chamber was of the coronation robes worn by the new King and Queen; in the bedroom Victoria used as a child, the dress that she had worn on her first day as Queen, her wedding dress, and other pieces from her youthful wardrobe were set up.[59] Eventually, showcases displaying more examples of royal dress filled other rooms.

The group of relics belonging to Queen Victoria remained a discrete entity, to be described in 1936 as *The Queen Mary Collection of Queen Victoria Exhibits* in a Declaration of Trust made between Queen Mary and Lord Cromer, the Lord Chamberlain, and Lieutenant Colonel Terence Nugent, comptroller to the Lord Chamberlain. It was, the declaration stated, 'never to be dispersed but shall forever be retained as memorial to her late majesty, Queen Victoria, and made and kept accessible to the benefit of students of the life and times of Queen Victoria'.[60] The importance of Victoria's history to the palace remained clear, but the immediacy of her connection to the contemporary visitor had begun to break down and now required explanation.

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[56] J. M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902); and J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, with drawings by Arthur Rackham (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906). J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* was first performed at the Duke of York's Theatre London in 1906.

[57] QVJ, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1899, 15 May 1899.

[58] TNA, Letter from Lionel Cust to the Secretary, Office of Works, 20 August 1902, TNA WORK 19/220/1902.

[59] TNA, Queen Victoria's rooms and exhibits, TNA WORK 19/221.

[60] TNA, Queen Victoria's rooms and exhibits, 1926–38, TNA WORK 19/861.

Under Edward VII a second house museum, Osborne House, was set up in Victoria's commemoration, and provides an interesting comparative case history. On his coronation day in 1902, the King announced, 'as Osborne is sacred to the memory of the late Queen, it is the King's wish that [...] his people shall always have access to the house which must be forever associated with her beloved name.'[61] As the terms of the Osborne Estate Act 1902, which established the transfer of the house from private royal ownership to the State, were negotiated during the following months, it became apparent that this was in contravention of the terms of Queen Victoria's will. This had vested the house in which she had spent a considerable portion of her married life, her retreat after the death of Prince Albert, and where she died, in her son, the new King, 'for his life, with remainder to his first and other sons according to seniority in tail general'. After several MPs asked questions about the propriety of the gift, Edward's letter of explanation to Prime Minister Balfour was published in *The Times*. It stated:

> Having to spend a considerable part of the year in London, and its neighbourhood at Windsor, and having also home ties to Norfolk (Sandringham) which have existed now for nearly forty years, the King feels that he will be unable to make adequate use of Osborne.[62]

In fact the services at Osborne were old fashioned by this date, making life there uncomfortable; it was geographically isolated, and there were limited opportunities locally for hunting and fishing, the rural pursuits the King favoured. Parliamentary qualms were quashed by Charles Ritchie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who explained that it was the King's right to dispose of his private inheritance in the way he felt fit, especially as in this instance it was so greatly to the national benefit.[63]

The Osborne Estate Act established that under the Commissioner of Works, and at the King's pleasure, the household and service wings of the house would be adapted to serve as a naval college and convalescent home for officers from the Army and Navy. Despite the stated intention that the part of the house opened to the public would be maintained 'as far as may be in its present condition', between 1902 and 1904 there were considerable adjustments made to the arrangements of pictures and furniture. Through the auspices of the house manager Mr Durrant, Sir Schomberg McDonnell,

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[61] TNA, Gift to the nation by King Edward VII: arrangements and date of taking over; Report of the King's Committee; Report of the Select Committee; Osborne Estate Act, 1902, TNA WORK 15/52.

[62] Memoranda included in TNA WORK 15/52.

[63] 'Osborne Estate Bill — Will of Queen Victoria', Parl. Debs. (series 3) vol. 114, cols 1241–42 (18 November 1902).

the secretary to the Office of Works, and Sir Dighton Probyn, comptroller of the Royal Household, many of the more notable paintings were removed to Buckingham Palace, including the majority of the works by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, Sir Edwin Landseer, and Laurits Tuxen.[64] Works with personal resonance, such as portraits of royal family members, were passed along to their sitters. The majority of paintings of royal pets were moved firstly to Buckingham Palace and then up to Balmoral. Works of art made of precious metals, or embellished with precious stones or enamels, were removed to Buckingham Palace, locked in the Osborne strong room, or placed in the private apartments. However, there was some effort to maintain an attractive and worthy furnishing scheme. Winterhalter's *The Royal Family in 1846*, which had served as a focal point to the Dining Room, was replaced by a copy by Enrico Belli, and Heinrich von Angeli's portrait of Edward VII and his wife, as Prince and Princess of Wales, with two of their children, which had been whisked away to Sandringham, was replaced by Rudolf Geyling's copy of the same painting that had previously hung at Sandringham.[65]

Significant changes were made to the furnishing schemes within the private apartments too — especially to the rooms used by Prince Albert, which had become a family shrine. Many paintings made by Italian, Flemish, and German artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were retrieved, leaving them hung largely with his own artworks, and those made by Victoria. Victoria's rooms also received attention from her successor. Personal mementos were retrieved by Queen Alexandra and princesses Helena, Louise, and Beatrice. In an action which might be read as a sanitizing of the late Queen's history, the new King had a portrait of John Brown, Queen Victoria's servant and friend, returned to Brown's family, and a portrait of Francis Clarke, another of Victoria's Highland servants, was destroyed. A bronze plaque was commissioned to hang over Victoria's bed as a mark of respect, and silver electroplated garlands of flowers and leaves were placed in Albert's as well as Victoria's rooms.[66] This editorial phase echoes the careful editing of the selection of the Queen's letters, which were published in place of an authorized biography, a project managed for the royal family by Lord Esher and his friend Arthur Benson.

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[64] Osborne, rough copy of inventory of pictures, vol. 1, 1873, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 1113103 (OM53); Catalogue of the paintings, sculpture and other works of art, at Osborne, 1876, RCIN 1048182; RCIN 1112772; Inventory of pictures at Osborne up to 1900, vol. 1, 1837–1900, RCIN 1112776.

[65] TNA, Inventories of the contents of Osborne House, excluding those belonging to the King: furniture, pictures, works of art etc., 1904–19, TNA WORK 15/44.

[66] Osborne inventory, RCIN 1113103 (OM53).

On 3 May 1904 the Durbar Room and the Royal Apartments on the ground floor of the Pavilion at Osborne were opened to the public — two days a week in summer, one day a week in winter. Regulations were posted at the Lodge to ensure that visitors approached the house in a dignified and thoughtful way. There were to be no picnics, no dog walking, and anyone who was scruffy or dirty would be ejected.[67] Visitors crossed the entrance hall to peep into the Horn Room and then made their way between ropes and stanchions through the Billiard Room, Drawing Room, and Dining Room. Despite royal retrievals, these remained busy colourful spaces, their original function evident, and redolent of the life lived not only by Queen Victoria, but also of the royal family over which she presided. Only the Durbar Room was set up as a more formal museum space, echoing the display approach followed at Kensington Palace. It was filled with showcases containing loyal addresses sent to Victoria on her jubilees by her imperial subjects. At the King's request, access to the private apartments on the first and second floors was denied. These spaces, later protected by a locked gate, would remain a family shrine for the next fifty years.

Early guidebook descriptions of the rooms are brief and neutral. The most powerful moment of connection with Victoria is conjured in describing the garden. There, visitors were encouraged to look back at the house, the windows of the first floor veiled with sun blinds, and to call to mind the death of Victoria in her private apartment there, and the implication of this for nation and empire (*Fig.* 7). It is interesting to find from a flurry of correspondence in the National Archives that the greatest worry for the first custodian was to prevent visitors picking flowers to take home as mementos, especially the Queen's myrtle, or from one of the memorial trees — little tangible relics to mark their moment of touching a national narrative. It was not until 1910, under Princess Beatrice's auspices, that a brass plaque was set into the floor of the publicly accessible Dining Room, marking the spot where Victoria's coffin had been placed prior to its journey to Windsor, bringing a similar place of connection into the house.[68]

The particular philosophies of display adopted for Osborne House and Kensington Palace ensured both buildings achieved success as visitor entertainments and royal promotional tools, despite differing levels of royal interest and engagement with the

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[67] Guy Laking, *An Illustrated Guide to Osborne: The Royal House, Incorporating the Durbar Room and the Various Other Places of Interest* (London: HMSO, 1919), p. 5.

[68] TNA, Isle of Wight: Osborne House. Bronze tablet in Osborne House stating 'Here in peace Queen Victoria lay in state awaiting burial at Windsor, 1st February, 1901', 1901, TNA WORK 35/120; Brass plate in dining room shewing where H. M. Queen Victoria lay in state 1901, 1907–54, TNA WORK 15/48.

Fig. 7: Postcard, Osborne House from the garden, 1905, chromolithograph.

sites. Kensington Palace, the place of Victoria's birth, was presented to public visitors through carefully curated displays which set up a well-rounded narrative of Victoria's long life history as the sum and pinnacle of royal dynastic achievement since 1688. She is presented within the context of a familial and ceremonial monarchical framework.[69] Kensington as a dynastic museum has proved useful, and future generations retained a lively interest in the site, adapting and updating the detail of the displays to new contexts. It had the additional benefit of being conveniently sited and suitably commodious to continue to provide living quarters for junior members of the royal family. Its historical pedigree and architectural value also brought it a level of respect and protection. When Edward VII considered future uses for Osborne on Queen Victoria's death the house was deemed a costly luxury rather than a royal asset. It was a modern house which had already become a mausoleum caught at the moment Queen Victoria, its creator, died there. This made it both uncongenial as a family home and inflexible as a useful

[69] Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780–1910: Royal Masculinity and Female Empowerment', in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. by Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 108–39.

advertisement for a modern monarchy, despite its potential as a powerful immersive visitor experience. The house was gifted to the nation and it would be the State, rather than the royal family, who curated its narrative. It is interesting, however, that at both Kensington Palace and Osborne House, Queen Victoria's presence was powerfully evoked by their respective curators via her absence. By being rendered mysterious, she contributed the most powerful moment of connection with the visitor and conditioned the way in which both houses were experienced as places of her commemoration and memorial.