

THE KEY MONARCHS OF WINDSOR CASTLE



King George IV

Although nearly 40 monarchs have lived at Windsor Castle since its construction in the 1070's there are five key monarchs associated with this famous royal building.

It is thought that William the Conqueror employed around 500 men to build the first wooden defensive structure in just five days. Fortunately, a forest surrounded the site of the first castle which provided all the wood needed to construct it. The hill on which the Round Tower now stands, known as a motte, was man-made.



Artist's impression of the castle in 1080

In those days, around 180 people lived within the castle walls and their source of food was the animals that grazed in the surrounding forest. The castle guarded the western approach to London via the River Thames where boats were used to transport people and goods more quickly than they would by horse and cart. William the Conqueror also built the White Tower in London – now famously known as the Tower of London. Windsor Castle is one of nine castles surrounding London, each twenty miles distance from one another, so that if under attack, a lighted beacon would be visible by them all and it would only take a day for help to arrive.



King Edward III

In the 14th century, King Edward III resided at Windsor Castle, when it was no longer made of wood – Henry II and Henry III had spent sixty years building a stone castle. The stone, known as Heath stone, which

self-cleans, was quarried from nearby Bagshot and it also makes the castle glisten in the rain – no wonder the castle often looks rather magical in our damp climate! Sharp pieces of flint were also placed between the stones to stop people from trying to climb the walls. During Edward III's reign, the English were busy fighting the French and the Scots, and there was less need for the castle to be a defensive structure, so Edward III made it more palatial. His royal apartments were built where The Queen still lives today:



The entrance to The Queen's Apartments

Edward III created the Order of the Garter to reward his loyal supporters after winning the Battle of Crecy against the French in 1346. Edward was very interested in the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and jousting tournaments often took place in the castle's Tilt Yard.



Representation of two knights jousting

French was the language of the English royal court at that time and the motto of the Order of the Garter was:

Honi Soit qui Mal y Pense (Shame on Anyone who Thinks Evil of it)

Today the Order is still the highest order of chivalry in England, and its spiritual home remains at St George's Chapel. Over the last nearly 700 years, there have been more than 1,000 Knights of the Garter – Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, was the 1,000th knight.

Garter Day is celebrated at the castle in June when the knights all parade to the Chapel after lunch in the Waterloo Chamber with The Queen. All knights are chosen by the monarch – the only order chosen this way – and there have only ever been 24, plus the monarch and the heir. However, today there are also additional knights (thanks to King George III), including foreign monarchs who are made Knights of the Garter, but there are still only the 26 knights proper.



The Queen, Prince Charles, and Prince William on Garter Day

Some 300 years after the reign of Edward III, Charles II and his queen, Catherine of Braganza, lived at Windsor Castle.



King Charles II



Queen Catherine of Braganza

The country had been 11 years without a monarch following Charles I's execution. The Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 gave Charles II the opportunity to decorate the castle in the manner of Louis XIV's lavish Palace of Versailles. Some of the painted ceilings, created for Charles II by Antonio Verrio, remain today, including the '*Banquet of the Gods*' in the King's Dining Room (below).



The ceiling in the King's Dining Room

Charles II established his own series, or *enfilade*, of rooms which started with a Guard Chamber – where weapons are displayed as a deterrent to would-be assassins – and continued onwards, getting gradually smaller, until you reach the King’s Bedchamber. The more important you were, the closer you got to the king, with the ultimate experience of being able to watch the king get up, or go to bed, in the ceremonies of the *levee* and *couché*.

At the castle today, the Queen’s Presence Chamber, where guests waited to be admitted for an audience with Catherine of Braganza, and the Audience Chamber itself, both retain much of their character of the time. Rich tapestries adorn the walls – besides being an indicator of great wealth they also served to keep the rooms warm!



The Queen’s Presence Chamber

The King’s Dining Room displays images of fish, fowl and game, and ornate wooden carvings by Grinling Gibbons. In here, spectators were admitted, viewing the king as he dined.



The King's Dining Room

This painting shows Charles I and his queen, Henrietta Maria, in the Dining Chamber at Whitehall Palace in 1635, with lots of spectators on the balcony.



Queen Henrietta Maria, and Charles II when Prince of Wales Dining in Public

Served by courtiers, the Master Cook prepared as many as 26 dishes for the monarch. The usual number of courses served was just 16. Charles II used the same silver-gilt plates as his father before him. The ceremonies involved a carver, server and cupbearer, liveried servants and – most importantly, a taster – to ensure the king's food had not been poisoned.

Another well-known fact about Charles II is his penchant for mistresses – Nell Gwynn perhaps being the most famous among them.



Nell was one of the first female actors of the time and she performed many comic roles. She had two sons by the king, by which time he already had seven sons by his other mistresses, including Barbara Villiers who bore him five children (one son was born during Charles and Catherine's honeymoon at Hampton Court, where Barbara Villiers remained with them!). Meanwhile poor Queen Catherine miscarried all her pregnancies. The king's roving eye fell on his Queen's beautiful Maid of the Bedchamber, Frances Stuart ... and Charles was enraged when Frances showed no interest in him and went on to marry the Duke of Richmond.



Frances Teresa Stuart

Charles II retrieved a lot of the Royal Collection, which was dispersed after his father's execution, and some of those splendid paintings by Sir Anthony van Dyck can be seen in the Queen's Gallery today:



Also created by Charles II was the Long Walk, which is 2.64 miles long and lined with a double row of elm trees.



The Long Walk

Two centuries later, in 1820 George IV was on the throne. George IV had an insatiable appetite for food, women and spending money.



King George IV

A bouffant-haired, showy monarch, George decided the Round Tower at the castle was not big enough and he elevated it by 30 feet. He also installed arrow loops and battlements in a medieval style, but these were purely for show.



The castle walls and the Round Tower

The ornate Waterloo Chamber was created by George IV. It is in the heart of the castle and used for Investitures and lunches for the Order of the Garter.



The Waterloo Chamber

Prior to George IV's reign, the chamber was an open courtyard. Now its intricately detailed roof resembles an upturned boat.

George IV also created the Grand Corridor, a private space commissioned to showcase his paintings, marble busts and exquisite French furniture.



The Grand Corridor in Queen Victoria's time

Finally, Queen Victoria and her beloved consort Prince Albert cannot go unmentioned. The castle did not see many changes under their stewardship, but they viewed it very much as their family home, as depicted in this painting by Sir Edward Landseer entitled, *Windsor Castle in Modern Times*.



Windsor Castle in Modern Times

The scene depicts Albert, who has been hunting in the castle's grounds and has brought back the spoils of his hunt to present to Victoria and their young daughter Vicky – including a kingfisher, which Vicky is holding. Game birds have been strewn across the floor between their many dogs. The queen welcomes her husband with a posy of flowers. The scene is painted in the White Drawing Room and, out of the window on the East Terrace, the Queen's mother, the Duchess of Kent, can be seen in a bath chair.

Many of our Christmas traditions were popularised by Prince Albert who recreated at Windsor Castle the German festive tradition that he was accustomed to. He and Victoria celebrated 20 Christmases at Windsor Castle, where a beautifully decorated Christmas tree took pride of place amid tables piled with presents.



Queen Victoria's Christmas tree at Windsor Castle, 1850

Victoria and Albert often designed gifts for one another, including items of jewellery made from their children's milk teeth! Gifts were exchanged on Christmas Eve and this tradition continues with The Queen and her family today.