

Buckingham Palace:

Where the Queen lives and works

> By: D.J.McGroarty

Buckingham Palace serves as both the office and residence of the Queen. It is one of the few working royal palaces remaining in the world today.



From late July, through August and September when the Palace is not being used for official duties the opening of the State rooms to the public is now an annual event. Since childhood, when watching the changing of the Guard, I had often wondered what it was like inside. Now was the time to find out! Provided with a compact "audio guide" I was able to follow the route at my own pace. I thought every room impressive but some especially memorable.

The Picture Gallery has paintings of outstanding quality by Holbein, Rembrandt, Rubens etc. Viewing the originals, many seemed familiar because of reproductions on biscuit tins or as jigsaws remembered from childhood. The Ballroom is enormous, 34 metres long and 18 metres wide. It is easy to imagine Queen Victoria and Prince Albert presiding over immaculately dressed couples in uniforms and crinolines dancing here when first used on 8 May 1856. It now has many functions, primarily that of investitures when recipients receive knighthoods and honours. The thrones, emblazoned "ER" and "P" were used at the Coronation 50 years ago.

My interest in medals was enhanced by the display in the Ballroom. In addition to the Order of the Garter and other British Insignia the Queen's worldwide travels are reflected by the 80 Insignia of foreign orders. They include those from Bahrain, Brunei, Oman and the United Republic Arab.

In the vast collection of unique furniture I was particularly impressed with the Table of

the Grand Commanders. The circular table, commissioned by Napoleon in 1806 has a top in Sevres china decorated with cameo portraits of Alexander the Great and 12 other great Commanders of antiquity. It was presented to George 1V by Louis XV111. Another exceptional piece which caught my eye was the roll-topped desk (c 1775) in the White Drawing Room veneered in fine marquetry, purchased by George IV in 1825. The music room is associated with Royal Christenings. The Queen's three children were baptised here with water brought from the River Jordan. What impressed me most throughout all the splendour was the feeling that the rooms were normally in regular use. The exit is through the 40 acre garden, a large and varied green landscape, the habitat for hundreds of plant and bird species. I found the National Express coach service convenient for a day return from Southampton to Victoria less than half a mile from the palace. ■



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