

## Big Changes At Buckingham Palace

A notable royal anniversary is being celebrated with a big bang. There hasn't been a whisper, let alone fireworks, to commemorate the fact that Buckingham Palace is now the oldest occupied royal palace in the world.

It's just 200 years since a young bridegroom of twenty-four bought Buckingham House for his seventeen-year-old bride. As custom dictated in those days, young King George III intended the place as a dowry house for the widow he would leave when he died.

Instead, the young couple moved in, just in time for their first baby — who became King George IV and in twenty-one years they had a family of fifteen children.

The price of the house seemed a bargain. It was less than \$3 for the less than 30,000 fruitful masonry trees in the garden.

It had been built by a Duke of Buckingham who acted as a jural local squire, laying out graves and bowing alleys for people to have fun.

Right to this day the old mansion is still in existence, forming part of the west garden front.

Guests are still apt to stumble between the blue drawing-room and state dining-room, because of the slight difference in floor levels.

It was seventy years before Buckingham House was raised to the status of palace. This came about when George IV decided to move in.

In a fit of economy he directed that his old home, Carlton House, should be pulled down, and the materials used in extending his "palace."

In reality, the architects quarreled, the workmen took too many tea and beer breaks — and the salvaged materials were time-wasting. Ten years passed and George IV died without moving in — his big ambition was never fulfilled.

Twenty-five mantel pieces still littered the courtyard and were moved to Windsor.

Only recently, our present Queen took a second look at a pile of broken stone in the grounds of Royal Lodge, Windsor. The pieces fitted together into human figures.

They proved to be the work of an important eighteenth-century sculptor and they, too, were part of George IV's futile salvage campaign.

Queen Victoria came to the throne before Buckingham Palace was ready for occupation. People were surprised when she relinquished Kensington Palace to her mother and decided to live in "the new palace" instead. Even then the strains were so bad that the fumes tarried fresh paint in a single night.

An official report on the Queen's new home revealed that "her doors will not shut, her bells will not ring and her chimneys never stop smoking."

An astute washerwoman, named Sophie Harding, noticed the smoking chimneys and went out to get the palace laundry contract.

Soot and smoke, she realized, meant a lot of laundry work — and Sophie scooped a contract worth \$3,000 a month at today's values.

When Prince Albert married the Queen, the time had come for reform. Carriages could hardly move in the courtyard because the ashes of 200 fires were dumped there each day by the housemaids!

In addition, fumes from the local gasworks filled the palace rooms. It's small wonder that Victoria and Albert decided to spend most of their time at Osborne and Balmoral — as far from the smelly palace as they could conveniently get. During Queen Victoria's long widowhood, the palace was occasionally lent to foreign rulers.

The most disconcerting guest was undoubtedly the Sultan of Turkey, who moved in with his harem, staged a prize-fight in the garden, and is even said to have summarily executed one of his servants in the palace precincts.

The coroner of the Royal Household never succeeded in getting to the bottom of the affair — or in locating the corpse, supposedly buried in a remote corner of the grounds.

Last year, however, was topped off to make way for the Hyde Park Corner road improvements — and during the excavations human bones were found.

Roughly ninety years old, they were supposedly to be dissection relics from the nearby hospital. But were they, in fact, the vital evidence of the palace murder mystery? asks Helen Cahcart in "Tit-Bits."

King Edward VII rightly called the palace a mausoleum when he took charge at the start of this century.

His father's moth-eaten clothes still hung in the wardrobes. The halls were filled with mournful statuary, and the great murals, painted by the great painter, were in a state of decay.

Back in gay Edward's time, the American musical comedies were staged in the ballroom with full sets and costumes. When King George V and Queen Mary took over, new ideas in entertainment had to be found. At palace garden-parties the Royal Warrant was in the picture, and the great murals were in a state of decay.

The palace is supposed to be more pompous nowadays — yet only last year, a chimpanzee party was held to amuse ex-service guests.

Just fifty years have passed since the palace had its great face-lift.

The frontage facing the Mall was looking very shabby. King George V directed that it should be rebuilt with entirely new stonework while he was on holiday.

This meant that the work had to be completed within three months. It involved putting 6,000 tons of cut and faced stones in position without removing a single pane of window-glass.

Two weeks had to be spent in putting the scaffolding in place alone.

The work went on day and night — and the King was so pleased that he staged a slap-up dinner for the 600 workmen at a West End restaurant.

Since then the chief change at the palace has been one of character rather than architecture.

Prince Philip has a marked-out landing place for his helicopter in the grounds. The sentries, in their pale-blue sentry boxes, have been moved behind the railing to avoid disturbance by tourists.

The State Apartments are seldom in use. Far from being the Queen's chief home, the palace becomes increasingly functional as the chief business office of the Monarchy — firmly closed to all save rank and privilege.

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## How the President's Word Was Sped

The second great Cuban crisis had its own moments which the public may now safely admit.

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## Things Are Spooky Down Underground

Down, down, 3,750 feet, through a labyrinth of lakes, waterfalls, until stopped by an underground river.

That was the recent achievement of a team of British pot-holers, in the vast Grotte de la Vache, near Grenoble, France, who equaled the world record.

They're tough, these cavers who vanish through rock-holes in Britain, Europe, anywhere, as scientific explorers or just for fun.

Why? As a dare, of course — to test their skill and resource, like mountaineers. To challenge a record: penetrate where no other human has trodden; perhaps encounter magical and breathtaking beauty in a subterranean fairyland, as did the world's most famous caver, Norbert Castet.

Probing over a mile into the Grotte de la Vache, his native Pyrenees, he stood speechless in a pale of crystal glittering with colour whose delicate formations surpassed nature's most gorgeous flowers.

Stalactites and crystals sparkled all around him. There were huge needles as fine as cobwebs which trembled and broke from the slightest vibration; silver strands like silk yarn dangling from roof and walls.

He walked on ice-floes, plunged knee-deep in bushes of the loveliest crystals. Ever new splendours kept him breathless.

That was the dazzling climax to several explorations involving hazards which only a long-tried expert could survive.

In one place he had to drag himself along, flat on his stomach, his cheek pressed to the ground, his feet flattened out, only to find the end black-out, only to find the end black-out.

To worm into another, a mere crack, he stripped naked to crawl, he crawled as thin as possible. He lay flat in icy water. His chest ground into the bed, the roof scraped him back. Then his head jammed and he had to squirm back.

But his most terrifying ordeal came when he was lowered on a rope over the brink of a dark abyss by a roaring waterfall. And when he was "dark," we recall his own words: "No solitude is comparable to the bowels of the earth, no night so dark as the blackness underground."

Castet wore a trench helmet — protection from falling stones — had an electric lamp in his hand and a whistle in his mouth to direct his descent to colleagues above by code-signals.

A jutting overhang left him swinging free in the void, kicking an ugly black wall at each swing, knocking on stones, occasionally brushing a waterfall.

At sixty feet he got a foothold on a ledge just big enough for his feet, and from this perilous perch he could see nothing below but the column of falling water.

Castet kicked down a big stone to sound depth. It fell, whistling like a cannon-ball, and crashed far below.

On the bottom, or just an outcrop? He couldn't tell. The rope wouldn't reach that far, anyway, so he whistled three times, then waited to be hauled back.

The rope stiffened, vibrated. He began to revive in space, whistled again, went up three feet — then down six.

His comrades above were exhausted, thwarted by the weight and friction. He spun like a top, dangled under the water while his hammer made him heavier.

Again he whistled frantically, but the rope must have got caught. Perhaps it was wearing

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