

18 PALACES AND POWER

Kings and emperors built palaces to show how rich and powerful they were. Today, some palaces are museums. Power has shifted to elected assemblies, such as parliaments, but even some presidents still live in palaces. The biggest palace in China and the most luxurious palaces of modern times were built for the homes of the rulers of oil-rich kingdoms such as Saudi Arabia and Brunei.

How old is Buckingham Palace?

The bit that most tourists see and photograph, the front, dates from 1913. So Buckingham Palace is a fairly new palace, as palaces go. It was originally Buckingham House, a mansion bought by King George III in the 1700s. From 1837 it was the London home of Queen Victoria, and ever since has been the London home of the king or queen.

⌚ *Although in use for the many official events held by the Queen, areas of Buckingham Palace are open to visitors.*



Which palace was built for a general?

Not all palaces were homes for kings and queens. Blenheim Palace in England was built (1705–25) for the Duke of Marlborough. He was England's most famous soldier. The huge house was a thank-you from Queen Anne and her government for Marlborough's victories against the French. It is named after one of his victories at the Battle of Blenheim. Later, Blenheim Palace was the birthplace of another famous Englishman, Winston Churchill.



⌚ *China's finest artists worked to decorate Forbidden City. Construction started in 1406 and took 14 years to complete. An estimated one million workers were involved.*

Who lived in the Forbidden City?

Chinese emperors, with their families. Palaces were centres of government as well as luxurious homes. Some were cities built in miniature, like the Imperial Palace in Beijing, China. It was designed for the Ming emperor and work on building it began in 1406. The job took a million workers ten years. The emperor and his family lived in the most secret part, known as the Forbidden City, because no foreigners were ever allowed to enter. The Forbidden City is now open to the public as a palace museum.

Fit for a king

Most famous power houses

- 10 Downing Street – London home of the British prime minister
- Elysee Palace – Paris home of the French president
- White House, Washington DC – home of the president of the United States
- Kremlin, Moscow – seat of government power in Russia
- General Assembly Building, New York – headquarters of the United Nations
- Berlaymont, Brussels – centre of power of the European Union

Lost room

The Amber Room in the Summer Palace at St Petersburg was decorated with 12 tonnes of amber. A gift from the King of Prussia in 1716, the room disappeared during World War II (1939–45). A replica was created to replace it.

➡ *The Summer Palace at St Petersburg.*



Where is the Winter Palace?

In St Petersburg, Russia. This area is so far north, close to the Baltic Sea, that in winter, days are very short. The Winter Palace was built in 1754–62 as a winter home for the royal family – another palace outside the city served as their summer home. The Russian tsars wanted the Winter Palace to rival any royal building in western Europe. Russia no longer has a tsar and the Winter Palace is now an art museum, called the Hermitage, with one of the world's great art collections – there are nearly three million works on exhibit.

Who was the first president to live in the White House?

The first president to live there was John Adams. The White House, in Washington, DC, is one of the world's most recognized buildings. It is the home of the president of the United States. The original house was built in the 1790s. It was burnt down in 1814, and rebuilt. Various presidents have made changes to it over the years. The White House has 132 rooms, including the president's Oval Office.

④ St Petersburg was founded by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703 to be his new capital (instead of Moscow).



Which king ordered a palace with 1,300 rooms?

King Louis XIV of France in the 1600s. Louis had big ideas and he wanted a bigger place than any other king. In 1661 work began on his new palace at Versailles, outside Paris. It had to be big – Louis's court had 3,000 people, and Versailles became the centre of court life.



⑤ The Palace of Versailles is now a museum.

Did You know?

① King Charles I quarrelled so badly with Parliament about religion and taxes that he provoked a civil war that resulted in his execution.



After Whitehall Palace burned down in 1531, a new palace was planned but only the Banqueting House was built. Charles I as beheaded outside it in 1649.

The medieval Palace of Westminster as home to English kings and queens. Today, only Westminster Hall survives.

The Westminster Parliament escaped being blown up by Guy Fawkes in 1605, it was burned down in 1834.

Amazing palaces

Sacred Palace, Constantinople (modern Istanbul) – covered an area bigger than 50 football pitches.

Doge's Palace – elegant home of the ruler or doge of Venice.

Pitti Palace – in Florence, Italy, built by the Pitti family in the 1400s and now an art museum.

Whitehall – London, a Tudor palace where Henry VIII died in 1547, burned down in 1619.

Escorial – Spain's most famous palace, built for the gloomy King Philip II as a monastery and library with many valuable old books.