

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION.

PRESS TOUR

of

Chelsea Hospital

Kensington Square

Kensington Palace

2nd November, 1940.

Chelsea Hospital.

Chelsea Hospital was built by Sir Christopher Wren 1682-1692 at a cost of £150,000, as a "refuge for old and disabled soldiers". The foundation stone was laid by Charles II. A legend makes Nell Gwynn the originator of the scheme, but it was really due to Sir Stephen Fox who was appointed Paymaster-General in 1661, though he may have got Nell Gwynn to broach the scheme to the King.

The building combines a Barracks with a permanent home. The Pensioners live more or less the Barrack life in wards or "messes" with cubicles - their rations are served out in the hall and taken into the wards to be divided. About 550 Pensioners are in residence and receive board, lodging, clothing, nursing when necessary, and a weekly cash allowance.

The Governor's house has a magnificent stateroom occupying two complete storeys in height with fine carvings, ceiling, fireplace and portraits. The Chapel is paved with black and white marble and the wainscoting and fittings are of carved oak.

The Hall, which was formerly the dining room - and is now the recreation room - also has fine oak carving. On the walls are portraits of military heroes, battle standards and the medals of veterans who have died without relatives to claim them. The body of Wellington lay-in-State here.

The Infirmary in the grounds incorporates some of the rooms of Walpole House which was occupied by Sir Robert Walpole from 1723-1743.

In the centre Court is a Statue of Charles II by Grinling Gibbons. Ranelagh Gardens, a fashionable place of amusement in the latter half of the 18th century, were on the Hospital property and now form part of the grounds.

Messenger Monsey was Physician to the Hospital from 1742-'88. He died in his apartments at the Hospital at the age of 95, leaving his body for dissection and directing that afterwards the "remainder of the carcass may be put into a hole or crammed into a box with holes and thrown into the Thames".

Dr. Burney, father of Fanny Burney, was appointed organist to the Hospital by Edmund Burke, who, to make the post more acceptable, raised the salary from £25-50.

Kensington Square.

Kensington Square was built in 1698 and was a fashionable address in the time of Queen Anne and the first two Georges.

In the time of George II "the demand for lodgings (in the Square) was so great that an Ambassador, a Bishop and a physician were known to occupy apartments in the same house". (Faulkner).

The Marquis of Powis, James II's companion in exile, lived at No.7. In Thackeray's "Henry Esmond" this was the home of Lady Castlewood, Beatrice, and Colonel Esmond, where they sheltered the Pretender. In "The Virginians" Lord Castlewood lived in the home of his ancestors.

Nos 10 & 11 were reserved for the Maids of Honour who could not be accommodated at Kensington Palace when the Court was there.

J.R.Green, the historian, lived at No.14 from 1879 to 1883.

John Stuart Mill lived at No.18 from 1837 to 1851. Here he wrote his "Logic" and "Political Economy" and from 1837 to 1840 edited the "Westminster Review".

Talleyrand, after escaping from Paris in 1792, lived at Nos 36/37.

At No.41 lived Sir Edward Burne Jones, 1865-68.

Other residents in the Square were:

Addison & Steele; Mrs Scurlock (Steele's wife, his "dear Prue") while he was courting her; the Duchess of Mazarin (1692); Sir Richard Blackmore, poet & physician to William III; John Hough, Bishop of Worcester; Matthias Mawson, Bishop of Ely; Thomas Herring, Bishop of Bangor and later Archbishop of Canterbury; and William Beloe, divine and writer.

Kensington Palace.

The original house was built by Sir Heneage Finch, Lord Chancellor under Charles I. It became a Royal Palace when it was bought in 1689 by William & Mary who enlarged it, and rebuilt parts, with Sir Christopher Wren as "Knight Surveyor of the Works".

It was the favourite residence of Queen Anne who improved and extended the gardens, and built the famous Orangery. It was the scene of her dismissal of her one-time bosom friend the Duchess of Marlborough.

George I built new state rooms with William Kent as his architect.

George II and Caroline lived there and Caroline discovered the famous series of Holbein drawings stowed away in a drawer. It was she who laid out what are now Kensington Gardens.

The State Apartments are by Wren with wainscoting by Grinling Gibbons. The King's Gallery is by Wren with an over-decorated ceiling by Kent, and a cornice by Gibbons.

With George III the Palace ceased to be a residence of the reigning sovereign and since then suites of apartments have been occupied by junior members of the royal family and by aristocratic pensioners.

Queen Victoria was born there in 1819 and it was there that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chamberlain came to convey the news of her accession to the throne. She received them in the Long Gallery and held her first Council in the room below the Cube Room.

Princess Louise had an apartment in the Palace.

Extensive restoration was started in 1898.

In 1923 the Chapel Royal was the scene of the marriage of the Crown Prince of Sweden to Lady Louis Mountbatten.