

## Clarence House - 24 HM Has A Nose Around A Royal Home

By Penelope Parkin | 20 August 2003

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Preview



**Photo:** the South Front of Clarence House. Photo: Mark Fiennes. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

*Making sure she'd practiced her curtsy and cleaned behind her ears, Penelope Parkin headed to the capital for a Royal visit.*

Clarence House is rolling out the red carpet until October 17 in honour of an impressive 48,000 visitors, but if you manage to get hold of a ticket, 'please don't touch!'

Harsh warnings indeed from our guide as we crossed the threshold of Clarence House. Undoubtedly offered in jest, but it did seem the rules would be strictly enforced were any of the elderly ladies in our party to stray from the walkways to get that little bit closer to some of the royal artefacts on show.

Clarence House was originally built as the home of William Duke of Clarence, the brother of King George IV (who naturally lived in Buckingham Palace) and Frederick Duke of York who lived in the adjacent Lancaster House.

**Photo:** A Conversation Piece at Aintree, c.1927-30, Walter Richard Sickert, ARA (1860-1942). The Morning Room, Clarence House. © Estate of Walter R. Sickert 2003. All Rights Reserved, DACS. Photo: © The Royal Collection.



With its white stucco frontage, it marks a striking contrast with its neighbour, Saint James's Palace, which is somewhat larger and constructed from well-worn red brick.

Once inside, the most striking thing about Clarence House is its warm, family atmosphere.

Then there are the animals. With dogs above the dining table and a 'horse corridor' devoted to the 1843 royal Derby winner 'Cothorstone', the Windsor

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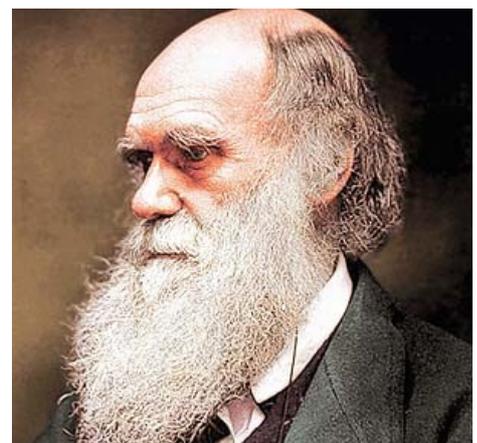
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family's love of all creatures great and small is hard to miss.

My favourite room in the house is without doubt the 'Morning Room', which is strikingly reminiscent of the Queen Mother, whose photograph resides somewhat curiously juxtaposed against an urn on a sideboard outside the door.



**Photo:** the Garden Room, Clarence House. Photo: Christopher Simon Sykes. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Furnished in pale blue the room has a cosy history of Royal mothers and grandmothers.

Amongst the various portraits displayed inside, two by Walter Sickert catch the eye. One of a girl in a pink gown hangs over the mantelpiece whilst a painting of King George V with his racing manager at Aintree hangs on the wall opposite.

It is however the room's loving adornment with portraits and sculptures of Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Margaret that stands out. Not to forget a comical sketch of Billie and Bea the corgis by Peter Beagle.

Another highlight of the tour is Prince Charles' newly furnished 'Garden Room', which contains a striking red Chinese style lacquer-ware cabinet.

**Photo:** HM Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, c.1961-7Graham Sutherland (1903-80). The Morning Room, Clarence House. © Estate of Graham Sutherland/The Royal Collection.

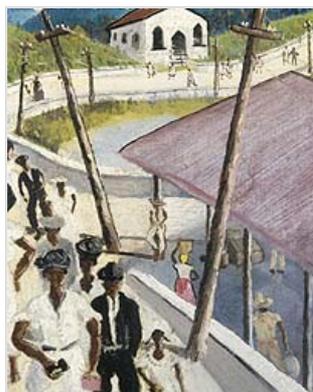


Brought over from St James's Palace, it jostles for position with a painting of birds from the Windsor Palace aviary, a giant footstool and a piano, which holds a book of Noel Coward songs said to be a favourite with the Queen.

There are more official rooms of course. A waiting room next to the front door boasts a painting of a very young Queen Victoria with Prince Albert before their engagement, a distinctive bronze of Churchill and a frighteningly lifelike sketch of Prince Phillip, which hangs above the door.

Striking scenes of bomb damage during the blitz, painted by the Australian artist Norma Bull, are also displayed.

No doubt the Queen was impressed by the spirited image of a union jack flying triumphantly above a pile of rubble when she bought the set in 1947!



**Photo:** Sortie de l'Eglise, Jamaïque, 1961, Sir Noël Coward (1899-1973). The Morning Room, Clarence House. © Reserved / The Royal Collection.

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A library containing a range of books from military tomes to J.M Barrie's Peter Pan, as well as Dick Francis and PG Woodhouse novels is similarly revealing.

Originally designed to be the entrance of Clarence House it was turned into an informal reception room where the queen mother would have afternoon tea with guests when the front door was moved to its present position.

I think Prince Charles, William and Harry will be much cosier here than in St James's Palace. Clarence House is thoroughly bats but I liked it!

*24 Hour Museum readers should note that tickets for the current open season at Clarence House are now all sold out.*

However, there will be further opportunities to have a look and more information is available if you e-mail [information@royalcollection.org.uk](mailto:information@royalcollection.org.uk) or telephone 020 7766 7303.

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