

# A VISIT TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE

----- JOHN OWEN

SMALL PARTY OF SOCIETY MEMBERS joined the coach on Saturday, 27th September to take part in one of Joan Liggett's mini-excursions; this time to Buckingham Palace which has been open to the public in recent years.

On arrival in London we had a lunch break at Convent Garden before moving on to the palace where we entered on schedule and without fuss or bother. As the Queen's official home it also serves as a centre for state ceremonies and official entertaining and it is one of the few remaining working Royal Palaces left in the world today.

Buckingham House, the property of the Dukes of Buckingham until the mid-eighteenth century, was acquired by George III as a private residence on his marriage to Charlotte of Michlenburg-Strelitz. It was George IV who had John Nash re-design it as a palatial residence where, in preference to St. James's, he could conduct his courts and official business. Our viewing of the palace showed how progressively enriched the interiors became under George IV, who was advised by the artistic guru, Sir Charles Long; this to meet the demand for opulence and grandeur.

Further practical alterations occurred during Queen Victoria's reign, including the addition of a new east wing facing the Mall, designed by Edward Blore and built by Thomas Cubitt between 1847-50. In 1913, owing to stone decay George V had Blore's façade refaced in Portland stone to a new design by Aston, giving the palace its present look.

We entered by the ambassadors' entrance, passing through the grand hall and up the sumptuous gilt bronze staircase,

through the green drawing rooms to the throne room with its magnificent chandeliers and the thrones, one with the royal cypher EIIR, the other a solitary P.

Next the picture gallery with its fine collection, including works by Vermeer, Zuccarwlli, Frans Hals, Rembrandt, van Dyck, Rubens and Canaletto.

Then to the state dining room, flanked by the blue drawing room and the music room, all facing west and overlooking the garden, landscaped by Nash and the head gardener at Kew, William Aiton, where the famous afternoon garden parties annually take place; they were started by Queen Victoria who spoke of them as 'breakfasts'!

Many fellow visitors felt the expanse of water beyond the garden appeared to be greater than previously envisaged. Therein lay the strength of this visit for it enabled one to actually experience and amplify those glimpses of the palace seen through media coverage of important events.

An abiding memory is of the unhurried quiet perambulation as one attempted to assimilate the grandeur of the whole experience of furniture, fittings, pictures, porcelain, sculpture, tapestries, silver-ware and gilt; and, of course, what an experience it was to look out towards the Mall on the many, many people who were looking in!

Our journey, both there and back, was comfortable, on schedule and relaxing, thanks to Gillies, the coach people.