

White Lodge, Richmond Park

During the first half of the 18th century, the architect Roger Morris was concerned with three important building projects in the area which is now the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The design of Whitton Place, the graceful little villa built for the Earl of Ilay in the 1730's and demolished about 1847, is now thought to have been from his hand. With Henry, Lord Herbert (later 9th Earl of Pembroke) he developed the design of Marble Hill, built between 1724 and 1729 for Henrietta Howard.



White Lodge

At about this time the two were also working on a royal commission - a new hunting lodge for George II, to be situated in Richmond Park. It was built in about 1727 and first took the name of 'Stone Lodge', which was later changed to 'New Lodge', thus distinguishing it from its neighbour, 'Old Lodge', which was demolished between 1839 and 1841.

New Lodge became a favourite resort of the King's Consort, Queen Caroline, who died in 1737. In 1751, her youngest daughter, Princess Amelia, succeeded to the Rangership of Richmond Park, on the death of Robert, Lord Walpole, the son of the Prime Minister. The ten years in which she held office were eventful ones in the history of the park. She regarded the area as private territory and, shortly after taking up her appointment, gave orders for it to be closed to the general public, with the exception of a few privileged friends and those fortunate enough to obtain special permits. Attempts to regain free public access to the park reached a climax in the action brought by John Lewis, a Richmond brewer, against one of the park's gatekeepers who had forcibly refused him entry. The case was eventually heard at the Surrey Assizes in April 1758, when the verdict was passed in favour of Lewis. Thus a right of way for pedestrians across the park was once again established.

It was also during the Rangership of Princess Amelia that work was begun on the two wings of New Lodge. These were designed by Stephen Wright, Clerk of Works at Hampton Court. The quadrant corridors and entrance vestibule were added in the early 19th century. Princess Amelia was succeeded as Ranger by John, Earl of Bute, who lived in new Lodge from 1761 until his death in 1792.

In 1768, one of the first known references to the house as 'White Lodge' appeared in the journal of Lady Mary Coke. Her entry for Sunday, July 24th included the following passage:-

'We return'd home by Richmond Park, & went past both the Lodges, but saw nothing of their Majestys, tho' they are always at the White Lodge on a Sunday, that the Gardens at Richmond may be open.'

The disrepair into which the house was allowed to fall after 1792 was made good by George III, who, in 1801, presented the property for life to the Rt. Hon. Henry Addington. Addington was created Viscount Sidmouth in 1805, the year in which White Lodge was given its own private gardens, later to be landscaped by Humphrey Repton. The King

himself having taken over the office of Ranger, Lord Sidmouth was made Deputy Ranger in 1813. Amongst the many famous visitors to White Lodge during his tenancy was Lord Nelson, who, on 10th September 1805 (some six weeks before Trafalgar) explained to his host his proposed plan of attack, drawing out the lines with a wine-moistened finger on a table top.

Lord Sidmouth died at White Lodge in 1844, after which the house was occupied by Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, until her death in 1857. In the spring of the following year it became the home of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), whose father explained the circumstances behind the move in a letter to Baron Stockmar, dated 2nd April 1858:-

"Next week he [the Prince] is to make a run for fourteen days to the South of Ireland with Mr. Gibbs, Captain de Ros, and Dr. Minter, by way of recreation. When he returns to London he is to take up his residence at the White Lodge in Richmond Park, so as to prepare for a military examination. As companions for him we have appointed three very distinguished young men of from twenty-three to twenty-six years of age, who are to occupy in monthly rotation a kind of equerry's place about him and from whose more intimate intercourse I anticipate no small benefit to Bertie ...besides these three, only Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Tarvor [tutors] will go with him to Richmond."

It is hardly surprising that the Prince was desperately bored at White Lodge.

In 1861, Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort stayed at the Lodge, following the death of the Queen's mother, The Duchess of Kent, then in 1869 it was presented to the Duke and Duchess of Teck, whose home it was to remain for almost 30 years.

Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck, was no stranger to the district. She had been brought up at Cambridge Cottage on Kew Green and was married at the Kew Parish Church in 1866. Her daughter, Princess Victoria Mary (known throughout her youth as "Princess May") was only two years old when the family moved White Lodge. In December 1891 she became engaged to Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, the heir presumptive to the throne, who died tragically of pneumonia in the following month. In July 1893 she married Prince George, Duke of York, who succeeded to the throne as George V in 1910. Their eldest son, the future Edward VIII, was born at White Lodge on June 23rd, 1894. Queen Victoria, his great-grandmother, visited the Lodge shortly after his birth and she was present at his christening ceremony held in the following month.

The Duchess of Teck died at White Lodge in October 1897. The Duke's health had been deteriorating and he died about two years later, in January 1900.

During the early years of the present century, the Lodge was the home of a Mrs. Hartman. The vast expense involved in maintaining the property helped to contribute to her bankruptcy in 1909.

In 1923, the newly-married Duke and Duchess of York (the future George VI and Queen Elizabeth) came to live at White Lodge. The Duchess was already familiar with Richmond Park, having spent part of her childhood with her maternal grandmother at Forbes House, Ham Common. It was Queen Mary's wish that her son and his wife should make their first home in the house which, for her, had so many happy memories. However, the Lodge

presented the young couple with many problems. Apart from the cost of its upkeep and the inconvenience of its situation, there was its lack of privacy. The Duke and Duchess were beset with large groups of sightseers, who flocked to Richmond Park at week-ends and at holiday times. After a few years, therefore, the couple gave up the Lodge and in 1927 it was granted to Viscount Lee of Fareham.

The last private resident at White Lodge was Colonel James Veitch, who lived there until 1954. In 1955, it was taken over by the Sadlers Wells Ballet Company as its junior school, which was later given the title of the Royal Ballet School, Junior Section.

More information on White Lodge and other famous buildings in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is available from the Local Studies Collection.