

The Landmark Trust

THE GEORGIAN HOUSE, HAMPTON COURT PALACE, SURREY

The building now known as the Georgian House lies on the shady north flank of Hampton Court Palace, across a narrow lane from the Tudor kitchens. Its appearance suggests a domestic building, perhaps built to house a senior palace official or junior member of the royal family. But this building began life as a great kitchen, built for George I as he engaged in a bitter struggle for popularity with his disaffected son, the Prince of Wales.

George I, or Georg Ludwig, Elector of Hanover, arrived in England in 1714, six weeks after the death of his second cousin Queen Anne. He had been estranged from his putative Queen, his cousin, Sophia Dorothea for years so brought with him instead his mistress Melusine von den Schulenburg, their three young daughters, and his adult son (the future George II). The new King and Prince put on a performance of unity, but behind the scenes they were at odds. George I had Sophia Dorothea when their son was 11 years old, and the boy never saw his mother again, and never forgave his father.

The new Hanoverian court spent the winter at St James's Palace, the spring at Kensington Palace, and the warm summer months by the river at Hampton Court. But the rifts in the royal family were becoming pronounced, as politicians vying for position began to polarise around either the father or the son, and a dangerously competitive atmosphere developed when Robert Walpole and his opposition Whigs explicitly allied themselves with the Prince of Wales. George I cancelled his planned summer trip to Hanover in 1717 and concentrated instead on making his stay at Hampton Court as splendid and sumptuous as possible.

During the King's summer sojourn the palace was teeming with people: the council met every week on Thursdays, and on Sundays the king gave a dinner for large numbers of politicians and courtiers whose loyalty he wished to ensure. Evening receptions were hosted, as were morning levees, dances and card parties. The King's Office of Works was asked to make arrangements to cope with this new wave of court use, including a modern kitchen to provide for the sustained lavish entertaining. The architect charged with designing the structure was almost certainly Colen Campbell.

The following summer the King was once again at Hampton Court. Among other changes, plans for a detached kitchen were put into action, and the new building was erected a few strides from the Tudor kitchens. The design of the new kitchen was also a statement. Colen Campbell was a Scotsman who came to England with the Act of Union in 1707, and in 1715 published a lavish architectural book, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, promoting a new Classical form of architecture that rejected the baroque exuberance of the previous generation. In 1717, however, this shift had yet to happen, and this commission gave Campbell the opportunity to build a structure that expressed the new architectural style. The result is a building both sparse and imposing. Built of plain brown brick, seven bays wide, with two floors over a basement, its entrance is defined by a pediment over the three central bays. Inside, it was highly functional.

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Immediately inside was a serving lobby, behind which was a large single kitchen open to the roof, with large fireplaces on each side. On the far north wall two tiers of windows let in cool north light. While the kitchen occupied the three central bays of the building, the two bays on either side provided domestic rooms for its staff.

George I yearned for the cuisine of his homeland, and retained six German cooks, three bakers and confectioners. The German way of preparing meats, sausages and hams was unfamiliar to most English cooks and such charcuterie was imported to England. The old rooms used for cooking at Hampton Court were now known as the 'English' kitchen, indicating that this new kitchen was the domain instead of his German cooks – the German Kitchen.

By the 1760s, Hampton Court had fallen out of favour as a Royal palace, and was gradually partitioned up into scores of apartments inhabited by palace officials and 'grace and favour' residents. The kitchens were redundant, and in 1787 the western half of the Georgian House was converted into a house for the Foreman of the Gardens Mr Padley, providing fruit and vegetables on a large scale for the royal tables at Windsor. He lived mostly in the two western bays, and the kitchen itself was used to house a huge water cistern.

The eastern section of the house (now the Landmark let) was created in 1834, when instructions were given for 'Fitting up of apartments for the Clerk of Works within the Precincts of Hampton Court Palace in the wing of an old kitchen'. A new entrance was made on the east front from the walled garden, with a series of new internal partitions and inserting a staircase. Part of the north end of the original great kitchen became part of this residence, reached through a door cut into the centre of the three eastern hearths. Shortly afterward the Clerk of Works Mr C.A. Craib took up residence. This eastern half of the building was assigned to the person responsible for the fabric of the palace until the 1980s, when it was home to the Palace Superintendent. The creation of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency in 1989 brought this position to an end, and so a new use was sought. In 1991, Landmark agreed to take on the eastern half of what by now had long been known as the Georgian House.

The main rooms, dating originally from 1719, but only converted to domestic use in 1834, have been decorated with more of the later period in mind. Clues can still be found to the building's curious past, however, and the way in which a conventional dwelling was fitted into a structure designed for quite another purpose. This becomes most obvious as you pass through into the central space, where the modern kitchen sits inside its royal predecessor. It now has a stone floor once again, and the great arches of the fireplaces can be seen in the walls, blocked on the east, but providing space for cloakrooms and cupboards on the west. The final task was to renew the rather functional pergola on the east front to a more decorative design.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Georgian House sleeps up to 8 people.

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