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## Stories behind 100 years of iconic royal photographs revealed in new exhibition at The King's Gallery

An unseen family photograph marking the birth of four royal babies; The Queen Mother's personal copy of her daughter's Coronation portrait; and the earliest surviving colour photographic print of a member of the Royal Family are among the highlights of the new exhibition **Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography**, opening tomorrow (Friday, 17 May) at The King's Gallery, Buckingham Palace.

The exhibition charts the evolution of royal portrait photography from the 1920s to the present day through more than **150 items** from the Royal Collection and Royal Archives. The photographs presented in the exhibition are vintage prints – the original works produced by the photographer – most of which are on display for the first time.



Snowdon, *Group of royal mothers with their babies*, 1964.

Alessandro Nasini, curator of *Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography*, said, 'The Royal Collection holds some of the most enduring photographs ever taken of the Royal Family, captured by the most celebrated portrait photographers of the past hundred years – from **Dorothy Wilding and Cecil Beaton to Annie Leibovitz, David Bailey, and Rankin**. Alongside these beautiful vintage prints, which cannot be on permanent display for conservation reasons, we are excited to share **archival correspondence and never-before-seen proofs** that will give visitors a behind-the-scenes insight into the process of creating such unforgettable royal portraits.'

Visitors will see the **earliest surviving photographic print** of a member of the Royal Family produced in colour. It shows Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester (sister-in-law to King George VI and Edward VIII) on her wedding day. The photograph was taken in 1935 by Madame Yevonde, a pioneer of colour photography and champion of women photographers.

**Unreleased wartime images** by Cecil Beaton will be on display for the first time, demonstrating how King George VI and Queen Elizabeth used photography to project a sense of stability and hope for the nation. A photograph of the royal couple inspecting bomb damage at Buckingham Palace in 1940 shows them smiling comfortingly at each other amidst the debris, while a 1943 portrait taken at Royal Lodge in Windsor shows them gathered around the King's desk with Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, conveying a reassuring sense of domesticity and calm.

Beaton photographed the Royal Family over the course of six decades and was chosen as the official photographer for **Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation** in 1953. Visitors will see a contact sheet of proofs from the Coronation sitting, alongside a note from Martin Charteris, the Queen's Assistant Private Secretary, recommending to Prince Philip which images should be sent as personal mementos to the Royal Family and Maids of Honour. The photograph subsequently sent to Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, signed by Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip and Cecil Beaton, will also be on display.

Alongside portraits marking official occasions will be pictures capturing more intimate family moments, including a **never-before-seen** image of four royal mothers – Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret, Princess Alexandra and The Duchess of Kent – holding their newborn babies. It was taken by Princess Margaret’s photographer husband Lord Snowdon as a **personal token of thanks** for Sir John Peel, the royal obstetrician who delivered all four babies within two months in 1964. Shown with it will be a **handwritten letter** from Princess Margaret to her sister, asking her ‘**Darling Lilibet**’ to sign a print ‘as a souvenir of an extraordinary two months of delivery’.

Photographs taken during sittings to mark **royal birthdays through the decades** will be among the highlights of the exhibition. These include Cecil Beaton’s charming 25th-birthday portrait of Princess Margaret, dressed in an evening gown with her dog Pippin in her lap, and a previously unseen contact sheet by Norman Parkinson showing the late Queen and Princess Margaret laughing and talking together during a sitting to mark their mother’s 80th birthday.

Visitors will also see Paolo Roversi’s memorable **40th-birthday portrait of The Princess of Wales**, in which Her Royal Highness’s dress and pose bear a striking visual resemblance to an 1864 portrait of Alexandra, Princess of Wales by Franz Xaver Winterhalter from the Royal Collection, which will hang nearby.

Innovations in colour and digital photography between the 1980s and 2020s revolutionised the medium, ushering in a new sense of experimentation and playfulness. Bold and colourful examples on show will include **Rankin’s** 2001 photograph of a smiling Queen Elizabeth II, superimposed against the Union Flag; **Polly Borland’s** Golden Jubilee portrait of the late Queen set against a glittering gold backdrop; and **Andy Warhol’s** 1985 portrait of Her late Majesty, sprinkled with **diamond dust** to make it sparkle in the light.

The exhibition’s free multimedia guide, narrated by **Dame Joanna Lumley**, features contributions from royal photographers **Hugo Burnand, Rankin and John Swannell**. Visitors will hear Burnand’s **behind-the-scenes account of taking the official Coronation portraits** of Their Majesties The King and Queen on 6 May 2023 – from cycling to and from the Palace to avoid roadblocks and getting soaked in the rain in the process, to doing dress rehearsals right up until the moment the Gold State Coach arrived back at the Palace from Westminster Abbey.

**Ends**

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**Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography** is at The King’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace, from 17 May to 6 October 2024. Further information about the exhibition can be found [here](#).

A selection of images is available via [Dropbox](#). For further information and images, please contact the Royal Collection Trust Press Office, +44 (0)20 7839 1377, [press@rct.uk](mailto:press@rct.uk).

Visitor information and tickets for The King’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace: [www.rct.uk](http://www.rct.uk), T. +44 (0)30 3123 7301. The King’s Gallery is open Thursday to Monday, remaining closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with the exception of 11 July – 2 September when it is open seven days a week.

This is the first exhibition to open at the newly renamed The King’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace, previously known as The Queen’s Gallery. To mark the occasion, Royal Collection Trust has launched a new scheme offering £1 tickets to those on Universal Credit and other named benefits, available for this exhibition between 17 May and 8 July. The King’s Gallery will also continue to offer concessionary rates,

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Press Office, Royal Collection Trust, York House, St James’s Palace, London SW1A 1BQ  
T. +44 (0)20 7839 1377, [press@rct.uk](mailto:press@rct.uk), [www.rct.uk](http://www.rct.uk)

including reduced tickets for Young People, and the option to convert standard tickets bought directly from Royal Collection Trust into a 1-Year Pass, allowing free re-entry for 12 months.

**An accompanying programme of events at The King's Gallery will include:**

- **A lunchtime introductory talk by exhibition curator Alessandro Nasini (20 May).**
- **A creative course in collaboration with The School of Historical Dress, exploring the construction of outfits featuring in the photographs (30 May).**
- **Family activity days in which children can create royal-themed photo collages inspired by the exhibition (31 May and 1 June).**
- **An evening event with photographer Hugo Burnand, discussing the behind-the-scenes process of taking the official Coronation portraits in May 2023 (20 June).**
- **An in-conversation event with Caroline de Guitaut, Surveyor of The King's Works of Art; Justine Picardie, novelist, fashion writer and biographer; and Alessandro Nasini, exhibition curator, exploring the fashions shown in royal portraiture (11 July).**
- **An evening event with Hugo Vickers, biographer, discussing the relationships between members of the Royal Family and the photographers included in the exhibition (26 September).**
- **Online events focusing on the publication and distribution of royal portraits (9 July) and the care and conservation of historic photographs (1 October).**

**Twitter: [@RCT](#) Instagram: [@royalcollectiontrust](#) Facebook: [@royalcollectiontrust](#)**

### **Notes to Editors**

**Royal Collection Trust**, a department of the Royal Household, is responsible for the care of the Royal Collection and manages the public opening of the official residences of The King. Income generated from admissions and from associated commercial activities contributes directly to The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of The Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection, and the promotion of access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational programmes.

**The Royal Collection** is among the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It comprises almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 15 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for his successors and the nation, and is not owned by The King as a private individual.

Admission to The King's Gallery, Buckingham Palace is managed by The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity in England and Wales (1016972) and in Scotland (SCO39772).