



# BUCKINGHAM PALACE

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CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS: TEACHER NOTES  
THE STATE ROOMS, BUCKINGHAM PALACE

## Creative Writing in Queen Victoria's Buckingham Palace

*A very stately palace before him, the name of which was Beautiful*  
**John Bunyan**

A visit to Buckingham Palace makes an exciting and intriguing source for creative writing. Descriptions can be made of its fabulous rooms and the treasures they hold, and stories and dialogues written about the people who live there. This year's creative writing sessions for schools will explore its making and its history, especially the changes and innovations made by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and others working with them.

Buckingham Palace isn't just a tourist attraction. It's the imposing and historic setting for state occasions, banquets and investitures, the magical setting for receptions, garden-parties and occasional musical events. It's the well-ordered setting for the business of government - and during the summer opening, it's the vibrant and welcoming setting for thousands of visitors from all over the world. Victoria and Albert played a vital part in its creation in its present form, and also made it into a family home.

## A Brief History of Buckingham Palace

George IV once lived just down the road at Carlton House, but on becoming King, he decided that he needed something much larger, much grander – a proper Palace to impress the public and big enough for entertaining on a stupendous scale. He acquired Buckingham House, then just a large mansion, and with his architect John Nash, set about adding a suite of State Rooms and decorating them in a fashion he deemed fit for a king. Sadly, he didn't live to enjoy his creation – he died in 1830 while it was still being completed. His successor William IV hated it and spent his six years as monarch elsewhere. When Queen Victoria became Queen, she lifted the dustsheets and recognized the merits of the building as an appropriate focus for the monarchy. Her coronation and then her wedding to her cousin Albert came first, after which the newly-weds moved in.

But once married and with a growing family, it became evident that the Palace was no longer big enough. She made her feelings clear in a letter to the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. She wrote:

*'Sir Robert is acquainted with the state of the Palace, and the total want of accommodation for our growing little family, which is fast growing up... most parts of the Palace are in a sad state, and will ere long require a further outlay to render them decent... A room, capable of containing a larger number of those persons whom the Queen has to invite in the course of the season to balls, concerts, etc. than any of the present apartments can at once hold, is much wanted...'*

So the decision was made to extend the Palace with an addition to the West Wing. The architect Edward Blore and the designer Ludwig Grüner were engaged to build and decorate a new Ballroom, and to refurbish the Great Staircase with the addition of kitchens below. Marble Arch, which had been George IV's grand entrance, was moved to a new place at Hyde Park Corner where it still stands. A whole new East Wing was added in its place with rooms for the family and creating the internal courtyard and the façade with its famous balcony.

The result is the Palace as it's known and loved the world over today, and which your students will experience and write about on their visit. They will take away with them a 'Writer's Notebook' of ideas and reminders of the two hours spent in the Palace. We will focus on the changes made by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, making it a grand palace, a place of work and entertainment, and a family home as well. Their writing in the Palace and the follow-up suggestions at the end of these notes can be developed into longer, finished pieces of writing or other creative projects. A selection of the following images and views in the Palace will be used.

All images of paintings and works of art below can be found digitally at: [www.rct.uk](http://www.rct.uk)

## The Quadrangle

Huttons of Dublin

### **The Irish State Coach**

1851

The Irish State Coach was displayed at an exhibition in Dublin in 1852 when it was noticed by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who were visiting Ireland. She immediately bought the coach for £858.



Queen Victoria refused to travel in the Gold State Coach after the death of Prince Albert and the Irish State Coach was for a time her favoured coach. She had the roof decorated with the crown and rail with the national emblems of Great Britain and palm trees representing the sub-continent when she was created Empress of India in 1877.

The coach was designed to be driven from the box and has frequently been drawn by a pair or a four-in-hand. The hammer cloth and the box were removed in 1960, converting it so that it can be drawn by four or six postillion horses.

This is the coach in which The Queen normally travels to the State Opening of Parliament. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret travelled to and from Westminster Abbey in it for The Queen's Coronation.

## The Grand Staircase

### ***The Grand Staircase at Buckingham Palace***

1848

RCIN 919902

The redesigned Grand Staircase leading up to the State Rooms was finished in 1845, some fifteen years before the ballroom was completed, so for the time being, it served as a very grand entrance to congested and uncomfortable if elegant, public rooms.

The portraits that hang high around the walls of the Great Staircase are all of close relatives of Queen Victoria. She chose each painting and the place for its display as you see them today. They confirm her pedigree and the personal value to her of her family. Among them are:

Sir George Hayter

**Victoria, Duchess of Kent (1786-1861)**

Signed and dated 1835

Oil on canvas

RCIN 405421

Victoria, Duchess of Kent, was Queen Victoria's mother. Painted in 1835, the picture was a gift for her fifteenth birthday, when Victoria was still a princess. The Duchess wears a velvet gown and a hat with flamboyant feathers. The little spaniel gambolling beside her is probably Dash, the Princess's favourite dog. The Princess wrote in her journal: 'my full-length portrait of Mamma done by George Hayter has been hung up in my study and looks so well. It is so like & is so beautifully painted'.



Sir David Wilkie

**Augustus, Duke of Sussex (1773-1843)**

Signed and dated 1833

Oil on Canvas

RCIN 405420

Although Queen Victoria disliked Sir David Wilkie, the artist, it was his portrait of her favourite uncle, Augustus, Duke of Sussex, that she chose to put on the wall of the newly decorated staircase in pride of place between her mother and father. The Duke also carried the Scottish title of Earl of Inverness, and the Queen loved Scotland and all things Scottish. The Duke is shown in the costume of a Highland Chief, leaning on a Highland broadsword and holding a chieftain's plumed bonnet. The Garter star and sash are almost lost in the splendour of his dress. A targe, (a small shield), and the body of an eagle that he has presumably shot while hunting, lay at his side, while his dog gazes up at him.

The portrait flatters the Duke by portraying him as a rugged hero. In reality, he wasn't a man of action, but he was 6ft 3ins tall and painted from a low angle that makes him look even taller, so presenting a convincing impression of strength and courage.



George Dawe

**Edward, Duke of Kent (1767-1820)**

1818

Oil on Canvas

RCIN 405419

Both Edward, Duke of Kent and his brother, Augustus, Duke of Sussex, were born in Buckingham House before it became a palace. Edward didn't get on well with his father, King George III, and was sent away to become a soldier when little more than a lad. He rose to be Field Marshal, and this is the uniform he is wearing in the painting that Queen Victoria bought to put up on the Staircase wall. In the army he proved quite a disciplinarian but was also fair to his men and the hand on the cannon in the picture would suggest that he was always ready to defend his country.

The Duke married a widow, Princess Victoria Mary Louisa of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld at Kensington Palace. When their daughter, Alexandrina Victoria, was born in May 1819, her proud father said: 'Look at her well, for she will be Queen of England'- and – better known as Queen Victoria - indeed she was.

Thomas Lawrence

**Prince George, Duke of Clarence when a boy**

Before 1828

Oil on canvas

RCIN 405426

Prince George was only a few weeks younger than his cousin, Queen Victoria. He succeeded to the throne of Hanover, because Salic Law forbade a woman to inherit that title. The two thrones (Britain and Hanover) separated upon the death of William IV in 1837.

Queen Victoria inherited the British crown as the offspring of the Edward, Duke of Kent (1767-1820), the eldest son of King George III to have surviving issue; Ernest, Duke of Cumberland (1771-1851) inherited the Hanoverian throne as the most direct male heir. Prince George was Ernest's son, and succeeded his father in 1851. His reign was cut short by the Prussian annexation of Hanover in 1866. The Prince was brought up in Germany until the family came to England in 1828. He stayed at Windsor Castle with his uncle, George IV, who commissioned this portrait from Sir Thomas Lawrence, the greatest portrait artist in Europe at the time, in that year.



## The Throne Room



Dowbiggin & Co  
**Queen Victoria's Throne**  
 1837  
 Carved gilt wood, velvet  
 RCIN 2608

This is the throne that was made for Victoria when at the age of nineteen, she was crowned Queen of Great Britain. Made of carved gilt wood, the throne chair is upholstered in crimson velvet and lacework. On the top rail is a carved crown and national emblems. The frame is elaborately decorated with oak and acanthus leaves and laurel with berries – all symbols of power, strength and elegance. On the back of the throne are the emblems of Great Britain – roses, thistles and shamrocks.

There are several other thrones displayed in the magnificent Throne Room, but Queen Victoria's is the smallest, its seat the lowest. This is because she was tiny, 1.52 metres or not quite 5ft tall. With a throne the normal height her feet wouldn't have reached the floor, not quite the dignified image she would have wished to present.

This awe-inspiring room was the setting for several grand costume balls that took place soon after Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert. But it was not designed for such crowded occasions, nor for the flamboyant gowns with enormous crinoline skirts in fashion at the time, so a new, large ballroom was built onto the East Wing.

## The East Gallery

Sir George Hayter  
**The Coronation of Queen Victoria in  
 Westminster Abbey, 18 June, 1838**  
 1838  
 Oil on canvas  
 RCIN 405409



This painting captures the moment in the Coronation of Queen Victoria in Westminster Abbey when, after the Crowning, 'the people with loud and repeated shouts, will cry "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN": and immediately the Peers and Peeresses present will put on their Coronets' – in the Queen's words, 'a most beautiful and impressive moment'. The Queen is seated on the

Coronation Chair, wearing the Imperial State Crown. In her right hand she holds the Sceptre with the Cross and in her left the Sceptre with the Dove.

Sir George Hayter was advised to show the actual moment of crowning, but the Queen was adamant that she would not go down to posterity in the act of bowing her head.

Hayter received the commission less than a week before event. His fee was 2,000 guineas. He watched the ceremony from a box just above the royal ladies and returned to the Abbey with his son, Angelo, to make drawings and measurements, but his depiction of the ladies' stalls under a high Gothic canopy is imaginary. Portraits of 64 participants at the ceremony are included - sittings were arranged for them in the years after the event. The artist's family modelled the gowns and robes for him. His daughter Louisa modelled for the Queen's hands.

The painting was completed in 1840 and the Queen was delighted with it. In March 1840 The Times newspaper pronounced it 'a very splendid picture'.

But the coronation was not an auspicious start. The public was suspicious of a young girl becoming Queen and her predecessors had been unpopular. It didn't help that at the event, so much went wrong. The Archbishop of Canterbury forced the coronation ring on the wrong fingers, causing Victoria great pain. They couldn't get the ring off afterwards. The Archbishop made the same error at her wedding three years later. The Bishop of Bath and Wells turned over two pages of the service book by mistake and missed out the part in which the monarch is declared king or queen. The coronation was invalid. Victoria had already left the Abbey before the mistake was spotted and she had to return and do it again.

Finally, the elderly Lord Rolle became famous for tripping over the steps leading to the throne and rolling all the way down. Victoria leaped up to help him. This act of kindness was the first thing she did that made the public warm to her.

**Sir George Hayter**

***The Marriage of Queen Victoria, 10 February 1840***

1840-42

Oil on canvas

RCIN 407165

The marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert was a love match. In compliance with royal etiquette, she had proposed to Albert and they were married in 1840.



Victoria had been pleased with Sir George Hayter's painting of her Coronation and commissioned him to paint the wedding. He made alterations in the background at the Chapel Royal at St James's Palace as he had at Westminster Abbey, inventing the tall Gothic canopy and the huge door behind the bridal pair.

Hayter included portraits of 56 of those present at the ceremony and sittings took place over the following year. Only Queen Victoria's aunt Queen Adelaide refused to co-operate and Hayter had to refer to a miniature for her likeness. Victoria sat for him in her bridal dress, veil, wreath and all', and Prince Albert also posed several times. Hayter's son modelled the Prince's costume and his daughter posed for the Queen's arm and wearing the veil.

Just as at the Coronation, all did not go well at the wedding. For the second time, as he had at Westminster Abbey, the Archbishop of Canterbury forced the ring on to the wrong finger on Victoria's hand. But her white wedding dress and orange blossom wreath caused much admiration and became the fashion for white weddings that has lasted till today.

**Franz Xavier Winterhalter**

***The Royal Family in 1846***

1846

Oil on canvas

RCIN 405413

Queen Victoria is depicted here as both sovereign and mother. The scene is one of domestic harmony, albeit with many allusions to royal status: grandeur in the form of jewels and furniture, tradition through the Order of the Garter, and the suggestion of the continuation of the royal lineage.



The Prince of Wales, wearing a Russian blouse, the gift of a Russian cousin, stands beside his mother but meets his father's gaze. Prince Alfred is on the left in 'petticoats'. He walks towards his three sisters – Victoria, Princess Royal, on the far right, Princess Alice and the infant Princess Helena. Queen Victoria wears an emerald and diamond diadem designed by Prince Albert in 1845 and still often worn by the Queen today.

### **The Ball Supper Room**

**Sir Edwin Landseer**

***Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Bal Costumé of 12 May 1842***

1842-46

Oil on Canvas

RCIN 404540

Landseer's double portrait commemorates the costume ball held on 12 May 1842 at Buckingham Palace, attended by over two thousand people. Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, dressed as Edward III and his consort Queen Philippa of





Hainault, received the guests in the Throne Room, rearranged to create the setting accurately depicted here by Landseer. Members of the Royal Household were expected to appear in dress of the same period, although other guests could wear costumes of their own choosing.

The royal couple stand on a raised dais beneath a Gothic canopy decorated with a purple velvet cloth of estate on which the royal arms of Edward III, with its combined French and English quarterings, have been embroidered. The costumes were designed under the supervision of James Robinson Planché (1796-1880) and were specifically intended to give work to the declining Spitalfields silk industry. The royal couple's costumes were based on tomb effigies. Despite this attempt at accuracy, Queen Victoria's silhouette, created through tightly laced stays and multiple petticoats, betrays the fashions of her own era. Equally anachronistically, Prince Albert is shown wearing the jewelled Sword of Offering (Blair 1998, vol. II, no. 6), made by Rundells for George IV's coronation in 1821.

The ball of 1842 was the first of three costume balls held by the royal couple. The second, on 6 June 1845 was in early Georgian dress, while the third, on 13 June 1851 was in the style of the Restoration.

Eugène-Louis Lami

**Queen Victoria's Costume for the Stuart Ball  
1851**

Silk, lace, gold braid, silver fringing, seed pearls  
RCIN 74860

The most glamorous of all Queen Victoria's surviving clothes, this costume was inspired by the style of dress fashionable at the court of Charles II. The rich brocade of the underskirt was woven in Benares. The lace of the berthe, or collar, is a copy of seventeenth-century Venetian raised-point needle lace, probably made in Ireland and perhaps bought at the Great Exhibition.



**The Ballroom**



Eugène-Louis Lami

**The Stuart Ball at Buckingham Palace,  
13 June 1851**

1851

Watercolour and white bodycolour  
RCIN 919904

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert stand on the right, while the dancers of the English, Scottish, French and Spanish quadrilles approach from the left and make obeisance.

The third costume ball at the Palace evoked the reign of Charles II. The dancers of the specially-choreographed quadrilles approach the royal party in the Throne Room. Until the opening of the new Ballroom in 1856, this was the rather cramped venue for such occasions. Eugène Lami made many watercolours for Queen Victoria of events such as the Stuart Ball and also designed the Queen's gown for this one. (See above)

Louis Haghe

**The Ballroom, Buckingham Palace,  
17 June 1856**

Dated 1856

Watercolour

RCIN 919910



The grace and elegance of the new ballroom is evident in Haghe's painting of the second inaugural ball in June, 1856.

Even with the enormous crinolines and formal manners in fashion, there is a feeling of space, of lightness and ease. The painting shows the original decoration from 1856 since replaced by the current red, white and gold décor.

The great cost of building these additional rooms was at least partially covered by the sale of George IV's Pavilion in Brighton. Much of the contents was sold, but by retaining some – the gilded organ and the brilliant chandeliers among them – further economies were made. An example of thrifty architectural salvage and reuse!

### **Pepper's Ghost**

*A Pepper's Ghost is an illusion for making an object appear in front of you like a hologram. This how the scene with the dancers in the ballroom was created. It's named after John Henry Pepper who, in 1862, used the trick in the theatre for the first time. He made 'ghosts' appear on stage that could even seem to walk through walls and furniture.*

*You will find the instructions for how to make a Pepper's Ghost illusion at the end of the 'follow-ups' at the end of these notes.*

## The Dining Room

R & S Garrard

### ***The Alhambra table fountain***

1852-53

Silver, parcel gilt, enamel

RCIN I569

The table fountain is in the form of a domed Moorish temple, with three Arab horses led by two Moors. The fountain stands on a craggy rock cast in silver and covered in silver leaves and small palm trees, surrounded with silver dogs, birds and tiny lizards. The cistern of the fountain is contained in the dome of the temple. The water drains into a series of pools in the base. The flow works purely by pressure, and is controlled by turning the nozzle of the fountain.



The table fountain was commissioned by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1851. It was shown at the 1853 Dublin exhibition and again in 1855 in Paris, to universal praise. The idea for the piece appears to have come jointly from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Its architectural structure was modelled by Edward Lorenzo Percy, and was inspired by the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. The horses were modelled by Percy from three of Queen Victoria's Arabs, and the exotic plants around the base were closely based on botanical specimens at Kew Gardens by William Spencer.

The centrepiece was used throughout Queen Victoria's reign. It's seen on the table in a watercolour of the dinner held to celebrate her Golden Jubilee in June 1887. According to 'one of Her Majesty's servants' in a book about life at Windsor Castle in 1897, the fountain was filled with eau-de-cologne rather than water.

Minton, Staffordshire

### ***Dessert Stand (jelly or cream) (from the 'Victoria' pattern dessert service)***

Glazed and unglazed bone china, painted in enamels and gilded

1850-51

RCIN 59767

The dessert stand is made in delicate bone china with biscuit porcelain figures. Two tumbling children play on a pierced central stem above a circular plateau painted with floral swags. The pierced lower plateau stands on a base with niches with children representing three of the seasons.



Queen Victoria purchased the dessert service at the Minton & Co stand at the Great Exhibition, 1851 and it was subsequently named after her.

Lauritz Regner Tuxen  
***The Garden Party at Buckingham  
 Palace, 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1897***  
 1897-1900  
 Oil on canvas  
 RCIN 405286



Throughout her reign, Queen Victoria welcomed small groups such as Crimean War Veterans to the Palace, sometimes outside in the grounds, but the first grand scale royal garden party was established for her Golden Jubilee in 1887. These al fresco parties are still held today.

On a summer afternoon, as many as 10,000 guests are entertained in the gardens of Buckingham Palace and, now as then, the garden party is an opportunity for display and spectacle that sets the Palace grounds alight with colour and vivacity. For many years after the death of Prince Albert, her husband, Queen Victoria had been withdrawn from the public eye and rarely set foot in Buckingham Palace. Her few appearances were increasingly valued and her popularity re-established.

The royal garden party was repeated for the Diamond Jubilee in 1897 when she was approaching 80 years old and it is this event that Tuxen's painting depicts. It was commissioned by the Queen, who always kept pictorial records of all such events. The artist signifies the continuity of the Royal House of Windsor by the inclusion of the Prince of Wales, seen in black formal wear amongst the fashionable hats and parasols in the middle distance, and the Queen's great grandson, Prince Edward of York, the future King Edward VIII, in his sailor suit and petticoats in the foreground.

## Vocabulary

architecture  
candelabra  
centre piece  
chandelier  
coronation  
crinoline  
dais  
dessert  
footman  
guineas  
miniature  
order of the Garter  
peers and peeresses  
participants  
pavilion  
postilion  
shot silk  
silhouette  
sovereign  
waltz

## Some important people:

Queen Victoria  
Prince Albert  
Princesses Victoria (Vicky), Alice, Helena  
Princes Bertie, Arthur, Alfred (Affie)  
George IV  
John Nash  
Edward Blore  
Ludwig Grüner  
Charles Elmé Francatelli  
Lord Rolle

For further information, more images from the Royal Collection and lesson plans on life and the changes in Buckingham Palace from Queen Victoria's accession in 1837, to the death of Prince Albert in 1861, go on to the *London Grid for Learning Website* (please note, an LGfL login is required)

[queen-victoria.lgfl.net](http://queen-victoria.lgfl.net)

The screenshot shows the Royal Collection Trust website. At the top, there are logos for 'The ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST', 'MDU', and 'LONDON'. The main heading is 'QUEEN VICTORIA'. Below this, there are four small images with captions: 'Palace in Walling', 'Albert's Arrival', 'All Change', and 'Becoming Royal'. Below these is a section titled 'Theme: Palace in Walling'. It features a larger image of a young Queen Victoria in a white dress, with the text 'Queen Victoria when a Girl' and '1819 (oil on canvas)'. There is also a 'DOWNLOAD' section with buttons for 'Image' and 'Lesson plan'.

## Activities to follow up your visit to be done either at school or at home:

- Queen Victoria kept a daily diary. Write her entry after seeing Buckingham Palace for the first time. Furniture covered in sheets, dust everywhere, a flood in the basement and the garden a muddy wreck.
- A groom wakes up on the morning he's to drive someone important in a great procession - The Queen and Prince Philip perhaps or one of the Princes or Princesses or an important foreign visitor. Research what he has to do before he starts the journey. Write his check list and make a map of the route. *He must know how to address his passenger, exactly where he is in the procession and what is the length he must keep to exactly between him and the next coach.*
- Make a picture that gives an angel's eye view of an important event from the dome over the staircase. Think about how a crinoline looks from above for instance.
- Organise a debate between King George IV and Queen Victoria about what makes a really good party. Bring in seconds like Prince Albert, experts like John Nash and Ludwig Grüner and the people who have to make the party happen – chefs, footmen, ladies-in-waiting, seamstresses and guests.
- It's your birthday and you've been given a really disappointing present. Describe the excitement of opening the beautifully wrapped parcel and finding that you really don't like or don't want what's inside. Is the person still with you or did it come by courier? How do you say thank you? What will you do with the unwanted gift?
- Make speech bubbles for all the other people in the big picture of Victoria and Albert and their first five children. Draw in the other four still to be born and make speech bubbles for them about what they think is in store for them when they arrive in the Palace. Take a modern photograph of a family, a team perhaps or another group of people and make speech bubbles for them.
- Ludwig Grüner's designs for the ballroom have been made into transparencies and projected on to the walls and ceilings of the ballroom. Make some designs for your school hall – if you can't project them, just hang them up and transform it into a magical ballroom. You will find many videos on YouTube of the Victorian waltz. Practice the steps with a partner and work out some dance patterns like the ones at the Palace. The music they used is from Verdi's *La Traviata*. Why not dress up and have a ball in your new school ballroom? And make some iced desserts to go with it.

- Think about all the people at a dinner at Buckingham Palace: a footman, Prince Albert, a lady who has had to finish dinner early because of Queen Victoria, a cook in the kitchen, a mouse behind a curtain. Choose who or what you are going to be and write one special memory they have of the occasion. Attach your piece of writing to the middle of a cardboard plate and decorate the edge. Make a big display of all the thoughts.
- Make a soundscape of Queen Victoria's garden party: the horse and carriage, the fountain, a military band, some of the conversations, the little Prince being naughty and other things that might have happened but we can't see in the picture.

## Some suggested sources:

### Royal Dining



**Charles Elmé Francatelli** was chef to Queen Victoria for some years, though the dates are uncertain. Many of his menus and recipes are to be found in his book *The Modern Cook; a practical guide to the culinary art in all its branches*.

<https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-95770-33/page/n499>

Iced Puddings like those on Queen Victoria's dining table are to be found on page 452 and if anyone's feeling queasy, gruel is on page 494.

### **Sophie Herxheimer's decorated plates**

Sophie is a multi-disciplinary artist and poet who has exhibited widely including at Tate Modern, The Poetry Library and the National Portrait Gallery. She created a 300 metre tablecloth to run the length of Southwark Bridge, featuring hand printed food stories from a thousand Londoners.

Take the link to lots of ideas for a dinner party of your own:

<https://londonprintworkstrust.wordpress.com/2010/09/10/sophie-herxheimer-feast-on-the-bridge/>

# PEPPER'S GHOST

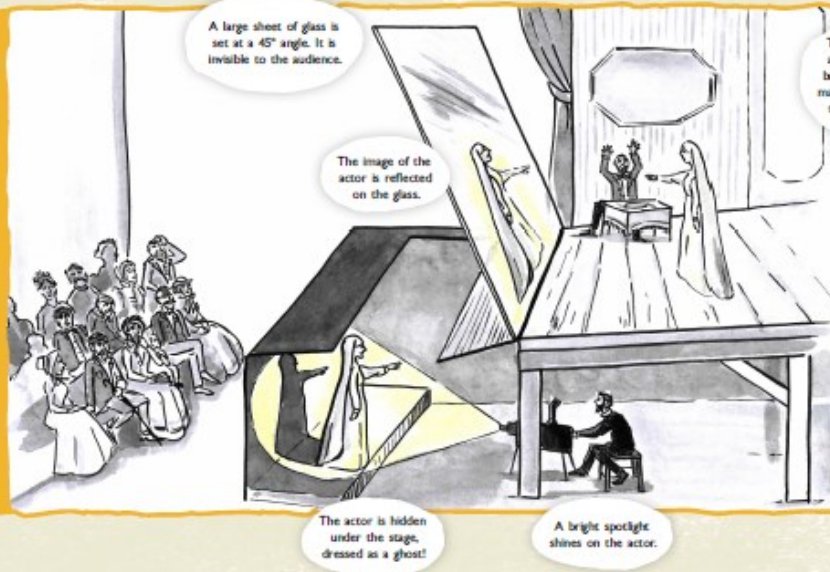
The display you have witnessed today in Buckingham Palace's Ball Room is a modern day adaptation of a Victorian theatrical illusion, called Pepper's Ghost.

The illusion was first performed in 1862 and caused a sensation. The audience saw a transparent ghost suddenly appear on stage, pass through solid objects and then miraculously disappear. Pepper's Ghost was named after John Henry Pepper (1821–1900), the person who developed it into a practical trick for the stage. Versions of the illusion soon appeared in theatres and fairgrounds across the world.



## How did it work?

A large sheet of glass was positioned at the front of the stage, set at a  $45^\circ$  angle. It was not visible to the audience, nor was the actor dressed as a ghost who stood hidden below in the orchestra pit. A bright spotlight was then shone on the actor, which projected their reflection onto the glass. This completed the illusion, making it appear as though 'a ghost' was standing further back on the stage.



Next time you walk past a shop window have a look at your reflection. This creates a similar effect, making it look like your ghostly reflection is standing inside the shop.



Take one of our activity sheets and try creating your own version using a smartphone or tablet.



## Did you know...

John Henry Pepper wasn't a magician, as you might expect. He was a scientist! He combined his scientific expertise with his natural talent as a showman to stage popular demonstrations educating the public about science.



# Create your own Pepper's Ghost



A Pepper's Ghost is an illusion for making a hologram-like object appear in front of your eyes. You'll have seen this today, with the Victorian dancers in the Ballroom.

It is named after John Henry Pepper, who used the trick in the theatre in 1862, to make 'ghosts' appear on stage, which could even appear to walk through walls and furniture.

Use these instructions to have a go at creating your own Pepper's Ghost illusion at home.

## You will need:

- A cardboard box – a shoe box is a good size
- An empty CD box lid and some tape
- A smartphone or tablet
- Toy furniture or accessories for the ghost to interact with
- A dark background to film yourself as the ghost

Cut a hole in one side of the box, about 4cm high and 4cm wide. This is where you will view your Pepper's Ghost from.

At the far end of the box from your viewing hole, arrange your scene where the 'ghost' will appear. You could use toy furniture and accessories, or draw your own backdrop. Remember it will be quite dark in the box so you won't need much detail.

Put the CD box lid in the box between the phone and your scene, and angle it at 45° from the screen. You will need to play around with it until you can see your video reflected in the CD box lid. When you are happy, tape the CD box lid in place along the side of the box.

Place your smartphone or tablet at the bottom of the box, near the viewing hole. Make sure the screen is facing upwards.

Time to make your ghost! If you would like to be the ghost, use your smartphone or tablet to record yourself moving about in front of a dark background. If you are using toy furniture like a chair you could film yourself sitting down on a chair. You'll have to do some experimenting to find out the best video – that's lots of fun! You could also find a video online, but you will need it to have a plain dark background and have not too much else going on in the video.

Press play on your smartphone or tablet, and watch your ghost appear in the scene you created! Now you know how to create a Pepper's Ghost, you can get creative. Can you make a film where it looks as though your ghost is sitting on a dolls' house chair? What other spooky and magical scenes can you create?

