

## The Royal Collection: Picture in Focus

Franz Xaver Winterhalter

*The Royal family in 1846, 1846*



Oil on canvas

251cm x 317cm

Commissioned by Queen Victoria

The Royal Collection RCIN 405413

### Who can we see in this large group portrait?

Queen Victoria, after she had been Queen for 9 years.

Prince Albert, who had become Victoria's husband 6 years earlier.

### Their five children, from left to right:

Prince Alfred ('Affie'), aged 2.

Prince Albert Edward ('Bertie'), Prince of Wales, aged 5, wearing a Russian outfit.

Princess Alice, aged 3.

Princess Helena ('Lenchen'), aged 1.

Princess Victoria ('Vicky'), Princess Royal, aged 6.

### How many boys and how many girls?

Victoria's two sons are on the left hand side of the painting; Prince Alfred is the toddler wearing skirts, as was typical for young boys up to the age of around 3.

As the eldest son and heir to the throne, the Prince of Wales stands closest to his mother and meets Prince Albert's gaze (he grows up to become King Edward VII).

The three daughters are arranged on the right hand side of the painting; the elder girls help to look after baby Helena, suggesting their future roles as mothers.

### **How can we tell this is a royal family?**

Although the family group looks quite relaxed and informal, there are clues that Victoria is a queen, as well as a mother:

A diadem, or small crown, made of diamonds and emeralds.

Jewels (earrings and brooches), to match the diadem, all designed by Prince Albert.

Grand furniture with lion heads on the arms, made for Victoria's uncle, George IV.

Royal colours of red and gold.

Blue ribbon and star badge, showing Victoria and Albert are Knights of the Garter. (Queen Victoria had made Albert a Knight of the Garter on their engagement.)

Formal evening costume, worn at official parties and receptions.

(Prince Albert is wearing a dress coat, waistcoat and breeches.)

### **Who painted it?**

Franz Xaver Winterhalter was a German artist. He lived from 1805 to 1873.

In order to invite Winterhalter to paint this portrait, Queen Victoria had to ask the French king, Louis-Philippe, to release him from his role as court painter in Paris. Winterhalter had first visited England in 1842 and he returned several times to work for Queen Victoria. He became Victoria's favourite artist and painted over 100 pictures for her.

### **Where are they?**

The family posed for this painting in a room at Windsor Castle, from October 1846 to January 1847. However, in the background you can see blue sky and a sandy beach. The picture was always intended to be hung at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, where it was displayed in the dining room. The landscape in the distance is probably meant to represent the view from Osborne House, looking out to sea.

### **What ideas and messages does the painting suggest to us?**

Permanence

Spontaneity

Seriousness

Tradition

Future

Formality

Grandeur

Everyday

Happiness

### **A popular image**

Although this painting was designed for their private home at Osborne House, the picture soon became famous. Before it was moved to the Isle of Wight, the portrait went on display at St James's Palace in London, where 100,000 people came to visit it. Queen Victoria also asked an engraver to make a black and white print of the portrait, so it could be reproduced for sale and copies could be sent all over the world. Why do you think they wanted lots of people to be able to see it?

### **Was Queen Victoria pleased with it?**

Victoria called the painting a masterpiece:

'a "chef d'oeuvre" ... such beautiful, brilliant, fresh colouring - & we were enchanted'  
Queen Victoria's Journal, 18 December 1846