

Benjamin Franklin

at Historic Royal Palaces

by George Goodwin



Competition

Q. Which King is most associated with Kew Palace?

- a/ George I;
b/ George III;
c/ William IV

To be in with a chance of winning please email your answer along with your membership number to members@hrp.org.uk using the subject line Benjamin Franklin. Please email us to enter by **6 June** and we will let you know by 7 June if you have been successful.

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Two entrance tickets to the Benjamin Franklin House museum
www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org
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Benjamin Franklin regularly visited one of today's Historic Royal Palaces, had a somewhat confusing six-day stay at another, and would most likely have become a prisoner at a third had he not fled Britain just before the outbreak of the American War of Independence.

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or good measure, his initial admiration for the King most associated with a fourth of Historic Royal Palace's famous buildings later turned to bitter hatred, as the two men became involved in a scientific 'war by proxy' echoing the real war on American soil.

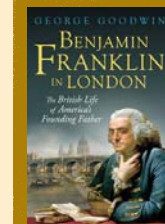
Benjamin Franklin is known as an inventor and scientist, as a fierce American patriot who signed the Declaration of Independence, and as the American emissary in Paris who brought France into the War against Britain - and kept her there. He is generally regarded as second only to George Washington for his importance in securing the victory of the fledgling United States. What is less well known - but will hopefully be more so through my new book *Benjamin Franklin in London* - is that he lived in Britain for the best part of two decades and that for four fifths of his very long life he considered himself, right up to 1775, to be an ardent British royalist. His house in London survives - whereas none in America have done - and it was from his base there, in Craven Street (just off the Strand), that he cut a dash across Britain as the first great transatlantic celebrity. He was an American who dreamed of a Great British empire of North America. It was only in March 1775, weeks before the outbreak of the American War of Independence, that he was forced to flee Britain to escape arrest.

Franklin spent eighteen months in London in the 1720s when he was an impoverished teenage printer. When he returned in 1757 he cut a very different figure. His own printing business had made him rich, he had won the 18th century equivalent of the Nobel Prize and was back in London as the representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly and attending royal audiences at the Kensington Palace of George II.

Franklin's political aim in London was to persuade the Penn family, who effectively owned the freehold of Pennsylvania, to pay some taxes; and, when they continued to refuse, he lobbied the British Government to govern Pennsylvania as a Royal Colony. However his plans were blocked in 1768 by the Secretary of State, Lord Hillsborough, the then owner of Hillsborough Castle. The two men's relationship soured and then completely deteriorated. Thus Franklin was astonished when, in 1771, after a chance meeting in Dublin, Hillsborough invited him to his home near Belfast. There, in Franklin's own words, he was 'detained by one thousand Civillities from Tuesday to Sunday'. It was then equally surprising that, once back

in London, Hillsborough returned to his previous attitude and, by 1775, was openly calling Franklin a traitor who should be hanged at Tyburn, or at least jailed in Newgate. Had Franklin been detained then his status would almost definitely have entitled him, as it did his fellow American Henry Laurens, to imprisonment in the Tower of London. However, he made his escape by sea before the inevitable arrest warrant was finally issued.

As to Franklin's view of George III, the King most associated with Kew Palace, it was initially one of unbridled admiration and he predicted that the reign 'of our virtuous young King... will be happy and glorious'. As late as 1772, Franklin was delighted to write to his son that the King had 'lately been heard to speak of me with great regard'. But in 1775/6, back in America, Franklin was enraged because the King had refused to listen to the colonists' complaints against Parliament. As for the King's view of Franklin, by 1777 he believed that the American, the inventor of the lightning conductor, had in 1772 deliberately designed one of his rods to attract lightning onto the Royal Ordnance depot at Purfleet. It was nonsense - the depot had been struck due to a break in the wire before the lightning was earthed. However, King George ordered that the contact ends of the rods on his palaces be changed from Franklin's points to rounded knobs. As to Franklin's own view, he described the change as 'a Matter of small Importance to me'. But then he could not resist adding, 'If I had a Wish about it, it would be that he had rejected them altogether as ineffectual. For it is only since he thought himself and Family safe from the Thunder of Heaven that he dared to use his own Thunder in destroying his innocent Subjects.' No longer a proud British royalist, Franklin had become one of the fiercest American patriots of them all.



George Goodwin's *Benjamin Franklin in London: The British Life of America's Founding Father* is newly published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £25.
www.georgegoodwin.com

George will be giving his sparkling illustrated Benjamin Franklin talk in the autumn at the Tower of London. We'll be letting members know details nearer the time so watch this space!