



The Courtiers: Splendor and Intrigue in the Georgian Court at Kensington Palace

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Kensington Palace is now most famous as the former home of Diana, Princess of Wales, but the palace's glory days came between 1714 and 1760, during the reigns of George I and II. In the eighteenth century, this palace was a world of skulduggery, intrigue, politicking, etiquette, wigs, and beauty spots, where fans whistled open like switchblades and unusual people were kept as curiosities. Lucy Worsley's *The Courtiers* charts the trajectory of the fantastically quarrelsome Hanovers and the last great gasp of British court life. Structured around the paintings of courtiers and servants that line the walls of the King's Staircase of Kensington Palace-paintings you can see at the palace today-*The Courtiers* goes behind closed doors to meet a pushy young painter, a maid of honor with a secret marriage, a vice chamberlain with many vices, a bedchamber woman with a violent husband, two aging royal mistresses, and many more. The result is an indelible portrait of court life leading up to the famous reign of George III, and a feast for both Anglophiles and lovers of history and royalty.

The Courtiers: Splendor and Intrigue in the Georgian Court at Kensington Palace Details

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Author : Lucy Worsley

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From Reader Review The Courtiers: Splendor and Intrigue in the Georgian Court at Kensington Palace for online ebook

Margaret Sankey says

New Georgian history, by a keeper of the Royal Palaces, and with new insight into the Hanoverians by studying the palaces they built or remodeled to see how the court functioned in the physical spaces--as well as included the social climbing courtiers, German hangers-on, the Polish dwarf jester, the Turkish Muslim valets, the pet feral child, assorted French spies and all the flunkies from rat-catchers to wig-washers to translators who made an 18th century bureaucracy function. I do love my squat, bug-eyed little Georges.

Sherwood Smith says

An enjoyable look at the lives of the first three Georges and their courtiers. Worsley gives a vivid account not only of courtiers, but those they took and interest in (like the poignant tale of Peter the Wild Boy) and those who built their palaces and painted the interiors (some great stuff about William Kent).

Two things occurred to me as I was reading this, and sometimes comparing specific incidents with letters and diaries I already have (like Mary Wortley Montagu's and Horry Walpole's): one, I should get down Thackeray's book on the Four Georges and the 18th century humorists, and read it again in light of what I've read here. So much of the humorists' op eds and satirical verses was obscure, as the Victorians who later wrote about them or collected them suppressed a great deal of the pungency and point.

Second, how very young these people were, and how emotionally screwed up, yet the fate of a nation (several nations) rested in their hands. It's another reminder of how closely politics and personalities are entwined . . . a cautionary tale, yes, but when the personality is taken out, and people become mere statistics, the scale of atrocity ascends sharply. I guess it's all a reminder of how very, very fragile, and superficial, is our pretense to civilization.

Katie says

Courtiers was a wonderful non-fiction book about Courtiers in the early Georgian Courts (George I & II). Sixteen of the courtiers shown in William Kent's Grand Staircase painting are brought back to life in vivid detail. It's almost like they are still alive and their plotting, cattiness and insults are as stinging then as they are now. Worsley's writing style is easy to read and overall, the book reads more like fiction than non-fiction.

Tim says

I will begin this review with an admission of bias. I am an unashamed fan of Lucy Worsley. Had she been my history teacher at school my life would have taken a very definite course, probably beginning with a declaration of marriage at 16!! She has the knack of taking the story of the great and good (and not-so-good) and making it accessible. I have always liked her delivery in her documentaries and this, the first of her

written works that I have read, did not disappoint.

Her examination of the Court of the first two Georges is witty, poignant and above all sympathetic. Even with the descriptions of the follies, foibles and downright nastiness of the people involved, I came to somehow like them all and in the end understand, as La Worsley describes it, that the Court was also a prison.

Sophie says

Immensely readable and engaging!

Lady Wesley says

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Heather Wilds' rendition of this gossipy history-lite book. There are lots of quotations in the book, and Wilds did an excellent job with a variety of voices -- from German-accented Kings to serving maids.

I like Lucy Worsley's breezy writing style; her research is decidedly un-breezy however. She is the real deal. But don't expect to hear much about diplomacy or wars; as the title implies, this isn't that kind of history.

My knowledge of 18th century European history is inadequate, except as events in Europe may have affected the American colonies. Thus, I knew very little about the reigns of George I and George II. (Now I need to find a good one-volume about George III, who I know was not truly the tyrant that I was taught about.)

Although I was familiar with French court life, I had no idea that the early Georgian court was so similarly stuffy and formal. The entire daily dressing routine just sounds ludicrous, although it was deadly important to the courtiers. Court life sounds boring and miserable for every one involved, including even the King and Queen. There was plenty of hanky-panky, and both kings had semi-official mistresses who wielded a degree of power.

The palaces were a far cry from what we imagine -- at times cramped, drafty, damp, and dirty. But there was also splendor, and Worsley's discussion of William Kent's work at Kensington Palace is fascinating.

I enjoy reading historical romances set in this period, and what I learned from this book will just add to my ability to imagine this world that was so dramatically different from our own.

Lauren Albert says

As ever, when I read about the world of courtiers, I wonder why anyone ever fought to be part of that world. How unpleasant it all was. Worsley made it clear that different people were there for different reasons-- escaping an abusive husband, seeking power, seeking wealth. It was, to use a cliche, "where the action was."

Worsley does a very good job of making the reader understand what it was like, and not just for the royals but for the people around them high and low. It is very readable--almost novelistic.

George Guven says

An absolute riot from start to finish. Full of salacious court gossip and scandal, this reads like a juicy novel but is in fact an enlightening glance into court life in the early Georgian era. Of particular interest is the exposition of the unknown courtiers that grand histories often forget: Peter the Wild Boy, the vivacious Molly Lepell and so on. But in exposing these shrouded figures, Worsley sheds greater light on the big players of history-the kings and the queens, the princes and princesses-their lives, and the Georgian era itself; and she does a fantastic job of it, too.

Emily says

I love gaining insight into a century of British history I'm a little murky on, but slowly coming to love! Lucy Worsley once again writes an entertaining, insightful, and readable history. This time revolving around the first two Georgian kings and their courtiers! I wanted to read this book anyways but I decided to read it now to prepare for an assignment in my Public History course where I am going to write a YA historical fiction (just a chapter) centered on court life during the Georgian period!

I have gained so much more than preparation for the assignment, and now I will find myself staring just a little bit harder at all of the painted figures on the King's Grand Staircase at Kensington Palace...

Freda Lightfoot says

This is non-fiction which reads like a racy novel. I loved it. We learn all about the scandal, the intrigue, politicking and affairs not only of George II and Queen Caroline of Ansbach, but the waiting women, various mistresses, a wild boy, a rather sad equerry whom Caroline took pity on, and an overly ambitious painter, among others. A lively band indeed. It is an absolutely delicious slice of Georgian life. We learn the identities of the characters painted on the Kensington Palace Grand Staircase, and how they lived their lives. We hear of Queen Caroline's dignity in the face of her husband's affairs despite his professed love for her, and her most painful death. And the descriptions of the jealous rivalry between George and his father, and then with his son which reflects dangerously close upon modern royalty. For anyone who loves this period, as I do, this book is a must.

Ruth says

This was a fascinating, and surprisingly easy read about the life of courtiers during the reigns of George I and George II. It has just the right mix of detail, wider context and anecdote to make it quite fun. Some of the quotes of the contemporaries are hilarious - witty, bitchy and LOL funny.

I'm one of those people who wonders what it was actually like at Court. The dresses look fabulous in portraits, but what were they like to wear? Answer: Incredibly uncomfortable. Did they wear them all the time? No. They were considered old fashioned then, and were actually melted down to recover the silver in

the thread. Was Court really as poisonous and powerful as I thought? Yes to poisonous (although noxious would be also truthful, since all the sweat, body-odor and general dirt of London made the Court very smelly), and yes and no to powerful (the center of power shifted to Parliament during the Georgian era after James II's daughters essentially complied in his sacking by the People. After this period, the Monarch and his heir were used as a political football by Parliamentary factions).

What I'm left with is a picture of a rather unpleasant, insular "village", where appearance was all, and whose inhabitants were lucky if they kept any vestiges of their own humanity. It would have been a horrible place to have lived and worked, and I actually feel rather sympathetic to the two kings and their families included. They didn't want to be King in the first place, but you are left with the feeling that they just grimaced and got on with it.

5 star read.

K.J. Charles says

A domestic history of the courts of George I and II, focusing more on selected wives, mistresses, children, equerries, hangers on, painters, lightly on upper servants. It's very informative about the running of the court and 18th century palace life, loads of detail, exactly the sort of thing that brings history to life.

I didn't actually enjoy it very much though. I think it was the writing, which is reminiscent of Worsley's TV persona (a huge plus if you're a fan of her presenting style, but I'm not) with novelistic interjections ("the duke carefully combed his hair and wondered what the day would hold" sort of thing). She also has what becomes a truly enraging habit of trailing the next episode in someone's story ("he could never have guessed what would happen next"), then switching to another subject, then when we finally catch up with the person again it wasn't actually very dramatic after all. Again, very TV.

IDK. I welcome the challenge to the idea that history should be a dry procession of great men and war dates, I found the content some of the most informative and interesting about the early Georgian era I've read (admittedly the competition here isn't stiff), and the writing wasn't bad, just a bit over-determined to be chummy. It definitely took off for me whenever Worsley got deep into the stories and dropped the commentary. So, yeah, just incompatible styles I think.

Christine Blachford says

Lucy Worsley came to my attention after her rather excellent BBC series *If Walls Could Talk*. She was so engaging and had a great way of sharing history in a fascinating way. After another series about the regency period, I decided to have a look at her books and was glad to see this one available as an eBook.

Covering the period of George I and George II at Kensington Palace, the book tells the tale of those surrounding the royal family, those that make up the hustle and bustle of court life. As well as looking at the twists and turns of the royal family themselves, we get to hear the unusual tales of courtiers, mistresses, feral children, architects, poets, and old wives.

From their diet to their health issues, from their marriages to their children, it's all covered in the book and

all done really well. I love the writing style, although it took me a little while to get into it. There were quite a lot of characters to get to know, but by halfway through I was curious to see what happened next in this royal soap opera.

The writing is supplemented with lots of quotes, so that we're really hearing about these people from the horse's mouth and it's clear a lot of research went into putting the book together. If you're interested in the more day to day goings on of life in court, this could be something you'd enjoy.

Freya says

review to come :)

Kate says

Did you see Lucy Worsley's recent 'Regency' series on BBC4? Did you, like me, find it disappointing in content and Worsley herself, as presenter, irritating in the extreme? Well, don't let that put you off buying/reading this book - because it really is very good.

It's packed with information, some of which might even be new to the more well-read history fans, and is written in an engaging, knowledgeable manner that makes the words flow and transforms the book into an easy, pleasurable read.

It is the opposite of everything I disliked about the previous book I read ('Passion & Principle' by Jane Aiken Hodge); Worsley has written with enthusiasm - but not too much, and has an intimate, slightly mischievous, manner of talking to the reader, as though she were sharing a delicious story or piece of gossip with a friend... which I suppose she is, in a way. Having said that, she always maintains a pleasingly neutral stance whilst still managing to show sympathy for the people she's writing about, leaving the reader to make up their own minds about the characters involved.

The story-telling path can be a bit twisty-turny at times but, far from being a distraction, is actually a clever way of presenting a large amount of information whilst keeping a firm grip on the reader's attention.

Comedy and farce, high romance and scandalous behaviour are never far from these tales of palace politics and intrigue, but the frivolous side of Georgian history is then always tempered by stories of sadness and misery, such as those of Peter the Wild Boy, or even tragedy and horror, such as in the gruesomely detailed retelling of poor Queen Caroline's last days (note: definitely NOT to be read whilst eating soup). Worsley has achieved a perfect balance of all the sides of court life and, as a result, has given us a book that offers the closest thing to actually experiencing the Georgian era - without the benefit of a time machine.

Highly recommended.
