

Daily Mail

Treasures from the palace playroom: An exclusive preview of the magical new Royal Childhood exhibition at the Palace

By [IAN LLOYD](#)

Have you ever wondered what the Obamas and Boris Johnson bought Prince George to mark his arrival, what Prince Harry made in his pottery classes, or what the future Elizabeth II nailed to her nursery cupboard door?

If so, then your prayers are about to be answered. Next Saturday, while the Queen enjoys a well-deserved break at Balmoral, a new exhibition entitled Royal Childhood opens at Buckingham Palace, forming the centrepiece of the annual Summer Opening of the State Rooms.

Following the mega-success of the Kate Middleton wedding dress display in 2011, the Diamonds: A Jubilee Celebration in 2012 and the rare showing of the Queen's Coronation Dress last year, this year's choice is a real royal corker. In the week that marks Prince George's first birthday, we'll be given an insight into 250 years of regal upbringing featuring more than 150 artefacts, plus a host of family photographs, most of which have never been seen in public before.

Indeed, hardly anyone apart from their owners and a few generations of nannies, maids and footmen probably knew they existed. Luckily, the Daily Mail has been granted a sneak preview...



Princesses Margaret and Elizabeth in the sand pit at their grandparent's home, Lord and Lady Strathmore at St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire in 1933

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S UNIQUE BABY BLANKET FOR GEORGE

At 12 months old, Prince George has already accrued a mini-treasure trove of historical items - and from some very esteemed admirers.

On display for the first time is a set of christening gifts for the Prince from the US President. Among them is a soft blue baby blanket made by Alicia Adams Alpaca Inc - a family business in New York's Hudson Valley with a herd of 200 Suri alpacas - which has been specially personalised.



Prince George hasn't even reached his first birthday yet but has already received some unforgettable gifts

Woven in one corner are the words, 'Presented to His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge by Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, and Mrs Michelle Obama, July 22, 2013.'

Then there's the mini Boris-bike given to Prince George last year by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, to 'acculturate him to the joy of cycling', according to Boris. Designed in the same blue livery as the Mayor's famous London rental bikes, it has the Prince's name painted in the logo on the front.

It can also be attached to the 'Boris-style' tandem he bought the Duke and Duchess as a wedding present in 2011. So now all the Cambridges can pedal en famille through the streets of Kensington, which is one paparazzi shot we'd all love to see.





The mini Boris-bike given to Prince George last year by the Mayor of London and the personalised alpaca wool blanket presented to George by the Obamas for his Christening.

He might not yet realise he's a future king but what other baby born at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, has received the fabulous 'Illuminated Congratulatory Resolution' - an official commemoration scroll - from the Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation?

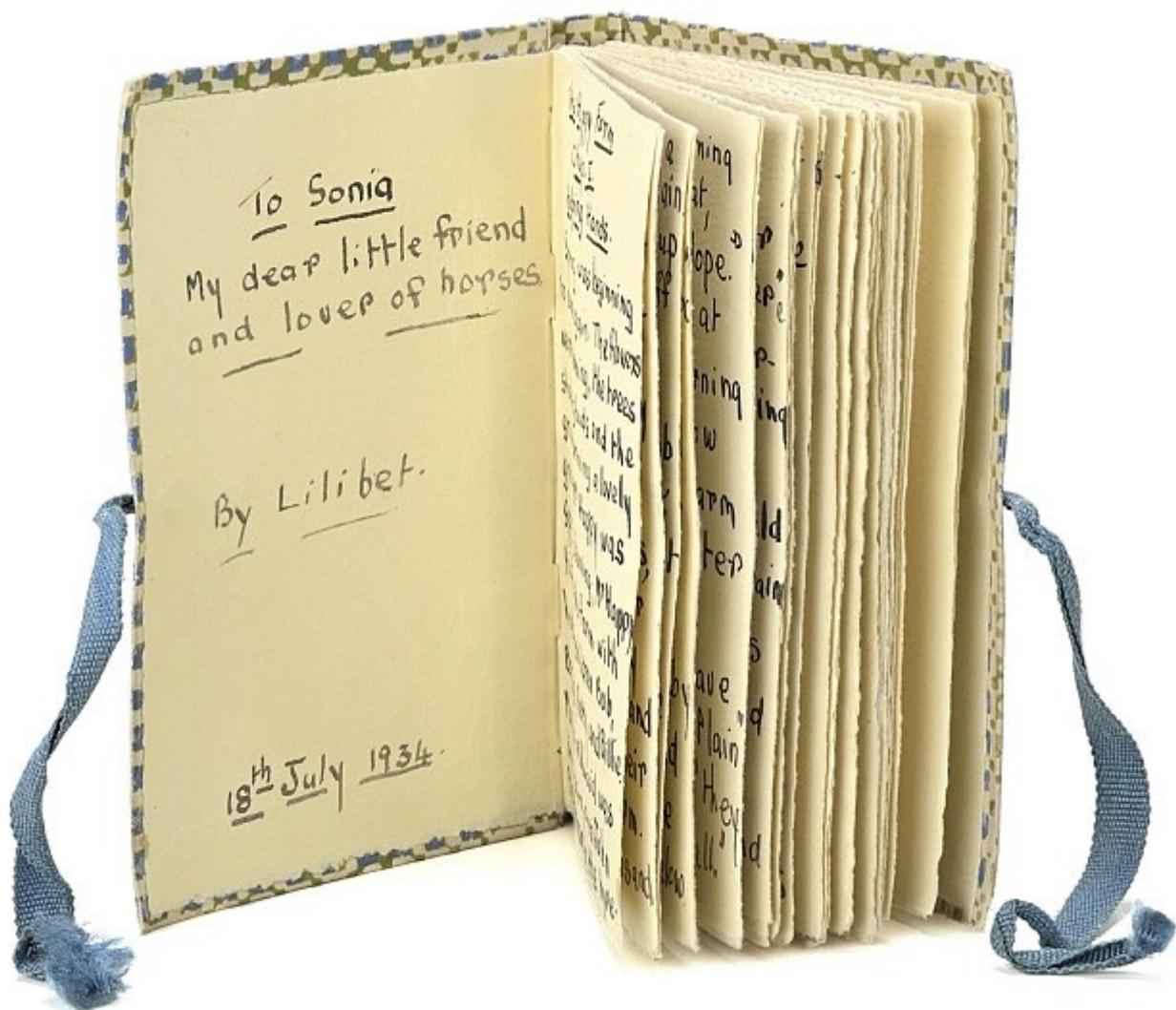
Then there's the silver breakfast set from the President of Malta, consisting of a spoon, plate, cup and egg cup, decorated with a Maltese Cross.

INSPIRED BY BLACK BEAUTY, THE CHARMING NOVEL HER MAJESTY WROTE AT THE AGE OF EIGHT

The exhibition really comes into its own with the many items belonging to the present Queen.

We know from several sources that her love of everything horse-related began in 1930 when her 'Grandpapa England', King George V, bought her a pony called Peggy as a fourth birthday present.

But the display reveals that the future Queen was a budding author too. In May 1937, aged 11, she wrote a detailed account of her parents' Coronation which regularly appears in biographies.

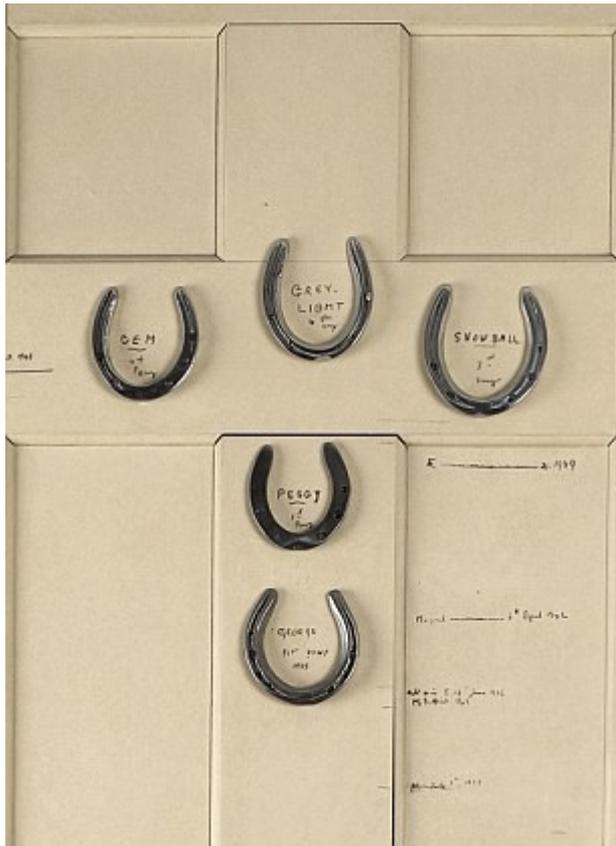


Queen Elizabeth's hand-written book, *The Happy Farm*.

However, what has not been known until now is that at the age of eight she wrote a charming short story called *The Happy Farm*, dedicated 'To Sonia, My dear little friend and lover of horses', though evidently Sonia never received it, perhaps because it was never finished.

Sonia was Sonia Graham Hodgson, who played horse-themed games with Elizabeth in Hamilton Gardens - a shared area for residents behind the family home at 145 Piccadilly.

The book has seven chapters about the antics of its equine characters, Bob, Barbara, Betty and Billie, and was perhaps influenced by a favourite book on the nursery shelves *Black Beauty*, which she read in an illustrated version in 1931 when she was five.



The Queen's cupboard door with her first horse's shoes nailed to it (left) and Elizabeth with Margaret on a rocking horse

The young Elizabeth also had a huge collection of toy horses on wheels as well as rocking horses made with real horsehair manes and tails.

Her conscientious character was evident even in those days when, before bedtime, these four-legged toy friends were 'stabled' on the upper staircase landing at 145 Piccadilly.

Each horse had its own saddle and bridle and was dutifully 'fed and watered'. When the family moved to Buckingham Palace in 1936 after the accession of her parents, the horses went on to posher stables in a second-floor corridor outside the princesses' bedrooms.

One of the most fascinating artefacts on show is a cupboard door from the nursery at Royal Lodge, the family's private residence on the Windsor estate. Here the young Elizabeth kept her favourite equine souvenirs, a shoe from each of her first four ponies - Peggy, Gem, Snowball and Grey-light. There's also a shoe from George, a pit pony, though only the Queen will have any idea how he fits into the pattern of things.



Elizabeth's collection of toy horses

The names of the horses were written inside the shoes by the young owner. There are also a series of pencil lines mainly on the right side of the door, which show the developing heights of the growing royal sisters.

Two marks, both dated 13 June, 1936, indicate that by then Elizabeth, aged ten, was almost a foot taller than Margaret who was nearly six. The door was taken to Clarence House when Elizabeth moved there after her marriage. It is still kept there, though today it's stored inside a modern cupboard in the home of the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall.

Just as impressive is the engraved silver cup presented to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge by the Royal Navy to commemorate the baptism of their son. The cup, shaped like a football trophy, bears the name of HMS Prince George, the battleship launched in 1895 and named after the future King George V.

The cup was presented to the ship three years later, and handing it on to the modern-day George neatly connects two royal children born almost 150 years apart.

QUEEN VICTORIA'S MOST PRECIOUS FAMILY KEEPSAKES

The palace display actually starts 250 years ago with the purchase of the then Buckingham House in 1762 by George III.

Recently married to Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the king said his new home was 'not meant as a palace but as a retreat'.

Fourteen of the couple's 15 children were born there and a series of portraits and figurines depicting the family introduces the visitor to the exhibition.



A casket containing the first teeth of Queen Victoria's children

There are many rarities on show, such as a doll's house or 'baby house' as it was known in the 1780s.

Thought to have been made by one of the carpenters on the Royal Yacht, it was the plaything of the king's youngest daughters Sophia, Amelia and Mary. His son Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, was the father of Queen Victoria.

Four months after his death, when Victoria was one, her mother the Duchess of Kent gave the princess a poignant keepsake - a heart-shaped locket with a lock of the hair of both parents, and engraved with the Kents' initials 'E' and 'V'. It's inscribed 'Present

from her mother to her beloved Victoria on the First Anniversary of her Birthday 24 May, 1820.'



Queen Victoria's locket containing a lock of hair from both of her parents

Queen Victoria continued the family trend and gave birth to eight of her nine children at the palace. She was particularly keen to document the development of her children, keeping the baby teeth of her eldest children in a blue glass casket, just as her own mother had kept locks of Victoria's hair tied in pink ribbon with a note documenting the date and place they were taken.

By the time of Victoria's death, her nine offspring had produced a total of 40 of their own. Hearing of yet another arrival, the queen observed tartly, 'I fear the seventh granddaughter and 14th grandchild becomes a very uninteresting thing - for it seems to me to go on like the rabbits in Windsor Park!'

One item in the exhibition proves she was more of a softie than she would have us believe - a fine pink and white wool blanket with a silk lining made by Victoria herself for her granddaughter, Princess Alice of Albany.



Five of Victoria's grandchildren horsing around Alice is on the far right

The present Queen was particularly close to 'Aunt Alice' and when she went to see her on her deathbed in 1981, the still feisty old lady asked Elizabeth to crouch down and turn off the electric fire on her way out, adding, 'They only put it on because you were coming!'

Alice is one of the faces in a fun photo in the exhibition that shows five royal grandchildren on a presumably industrial strength rocking horse with two tots on horseback, two more in wicker baskets at the front and back and one tucked precariously underneath, between the horse's legs.

WHAT FASHIONABLE LITTLE PRINCESSES THEY WERE

Very little Victorian children's clothing survives in the Royal Collection, though there is a beautiful white dress worn by Victoria herself at the age of 11 or so. Created from a series of bobbin-lace panels made from unbleached silk rather than linen, the dress is often called the 'Blonde dress' because of its shimmering appearance.





Queen Victoria's 'Blonde dress', and Richard Westall's 1830 portrait of her wearing it

Some of the cutest items on show are a series of baby booties with a truly historic provenance, since they were worn by Victoria's three successors.

A pair of blue quilted velvet ones were made for the future Edward VII in 1842, and worn that July when he was eight months old.

They were secured in place with a button tie at the ankle. The first pair of booties worn by Edward's son, later George V, appears to be hand-knitted with a pompom on both feet. Finally a pair of quilted silk satin slippers, decorated with small metallic crowns, belonging to the future Edward VIII, were lovingly preserved by his parents. Many post-war royal christenings were conducted in the palace's Music Room, from Prince Charles's in 1948 to Prince William's on 4 August 1982, the Queen Mother's 82nd birthday.



Matching pink coats for Elizabeth and Margaret in 1934

This same room is the lavish backdrop for one of the exhibition's highlights, a display featuring the Royal Christening Robe, created by the Queen's Senior Dresser Angela Kelly for the April 2008 baptism of James, Viscount Severn, Prince Edward's son.



The royal sisters in their matching coats

It's an exact replica of the one created for the christening of Queen Victoria's eldest child, Princess Victoria, in February 1841. Its most recent royal wearer was, of course, Prince George.

Royal toddlers have often been trendsetters. Victoria dressed her eldest son, the future Edward VII, in a sailor suit, and a painting by Winterhalter of the nautically clad lad was widely reproduced as an etching for the public.

The fashion took off and in upper-crust circles sailor-suited offspring were commonplace well into the next century.

Victoria was also devoted to all things Scottish. Her newly created Balmoral Castle was decorated from toe to turret in what one visitor called 'a feast of tartanitis'. The children didn't escape either and were kilted not only in Scotland but also at family weddings and on overseas tours with their parents.

Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret helped continue the trend for siblings to dress identically and a pair of matching pink 'princess coats' made in the early 1930s by Smith and Co of Sloane Street are on display.

Among the fun items are a fairy fancy-dress costume worn by the young Princess Anne as well as a doll clad in a 'mini-me' copy of the dress.

Then there's the soldier-style dressing gown worn by three-year-old Prince Harry on 9 May, 1988 during his overnight stay at Great Ormond Street Hospital when he had a minor hernia operation.

MY FIRST THRONE - PERSONALISED WITH WINNIE-THE-POOH, EYORE AND PIGLET

The palace nursery overlooked the Mall and Constitution Hill and has large windows and adjacent bedrooms for the children and nursery staff. It was filled with miniature furniture designed to suit the scale of its small inhabitants.

The future Queen's red upholstered chair looks far more comfortable than the wooden ones used by her grandchildren.



William and Harry's mini chairs decorated with Winnie-the-Pooh illustrations

Four of the latter are on display and we can see at first hand how they were individualised. William's blue chair is decorated with grey mice in uniforms; Harry's has Winnie-the-Pooh, Eeyore and Piglet on it. Princess Beatrice's is adorned with images of Peter Rabbit and Tom Kitten while Eugenie's is prettily hand-painted with flowers and bears.

Unsurprisingly Elizabeth and Margaret had a collection of dolls, although not as extensive as the future Queen Victoria's 130-plus collection of wooden ones. Two of the dolls have been reunited for this display, having spent the past 60 years in separate palaces. Made by the Poupées Raynal factory in France, they came complete with a set of outfits by Lanvin.

The Queen has loaned one of her favourite dolls for the exhibition. Named 'Pamela' by her owner, she wears a chic red beret and coat and has her hair in plaits, and seems to have survived the passage of time very well.



A tulip in a pot sewn on to a card by the Queen when she was six

The Queen has also loaned her Girl Guide badges that are kept in her personal collection, with her penknife, whistle, ruler and other Guiding paraphernalia.

From the next generation there is a set of 45 alpha-numerical bricks that was given to Prince Charles in 1949 when he was just a few months old.

They have been personalised with images of his family - photos of his mother and father, Princess Margaret and so on. Film footage shows a tower of these bricks being held up by his mother, the then Princess Elizabeth, at Clarence House as she encourages him to walk his first steps.

Another set of bricks is contained in a wooden trolley labelled 'Prince Charles Express' that dates from 1950 and which has been played with by later royal toddlers including Prince Edward's son, James.

Royal schoolwork across the generations gives us a fascinating glimpse into the lives and characters of the Windsors. A previously unseen tulip in a pot, sewn by Princess Elizabeth on to card when she was six, is in the exhibition near to an impressive blue glazed bowl made by 11-year-old Harry when he was at Ludgrove School. Given Prince William's adult interest in conservation, a geography exercise book written by him when just over four and a half makes for interesting reading.

Dated Wednesday 3 February, 1987, on the opposite side to his drawing, he writes, 'These creatures live in the jungle - monkeys, frogs, parrots, crocodiles, lizards, humming birds and butterflies.'

His teacher has used that schoolroom dread, a red Biro, to correct the letter 'j' in jungle which he appears to have written the wrong way round and then gives him a tick.

WENDY HOUSE? HER MAJESTY GOT A THATCHED COTTAGE!

One of the benefits of being a senior royal baby is that occasionally you receive some pretty spectacular playthings.

Y Bwthyn Bach was a sixth birthday present to Princess Elizabeth from the people of Wales and is still played in when the youngest HRHs visit Royal Lodge at Windsor, where it was assembled in 1932.

A hilarious contemporary photo shows Elizabeth and her mother climbing a ladder to the roof as if trying to inspect the thatch.



Elizabeth and her mother at the princess's mini cottage

Model cars have also been a much-appreciated gift. Elizabeth and Margaret were given a top-of-the-range and extremely rare electric Citroën which was renovated for

Prince Charles in 1953 with the original radiator replaced with a new Daimler design, and the number plate PC 1953 added.



Elizabeth and Margaret in their electric Citroën with their father

Two years later he and Anne were presented with one of their most unusual toys, a specially designed miniature Rollalong caravan, complete with its own water, gas and electricity supply.

A gift from the British Caravan Club, it was less than 7ft long and came with a tow-hook, enabling their father to pull them around the grounds of Buckingham Palace in an old Hillman Husky.

Their brother Prince Andrew must have been the most envied boy in his class, as well as among his siblings, when aged only six he was presented with a miniature replica of the Aston Martin used in the James Bond films Goldfinger and Thunderball.

It came complete with rotating number plates, a pop-up bulletproof shield, concealed machine guns, a working smoke screen and electric water jets hidden in the rear reflectors.

The only problem is it did just 10mph, which wouldn't have been much good if a Cold War assassin was giving chase across the lawns at Balmoral.

Royal Childhood is part of a visit to the Summer Opening of the State Rooms at Buckingham Palace, 26 July-28 September, 2014. www.royalcollection.org.uk. The accompanying book, Royal Childhood: A Souvenir Album, is published by the Royal Collection Trust, £9.95 (£12.95 in bookshops).