

The grant of the *Royal* prefix

In 1904, the Council set up an Improvement Committee *to consider what can be done to bring Tunbridge Wells to the front again, and to bring it abreast with other watering places.* There was talk of *spending a large sum of money in equipping an installation of baths, which shall be amongst the most perfect and the most up-to-date in Europe, along with a Kursaal or Winter Garden, where concerts of a high-class description will be provided, and where there shall be an orchestra and other attractions for visitors.* However, following the rise of the Ratepayers' League, the political climate was unfavourable to such ambitious proposals. Nonetheless, efforts were made to market the town's existing attractions more effectively, and a Borough Advertising Association was launched in 1908.

It was the Advertising Association which first suggested that an effective way of raising the town's national prestige would be to seek permission to use the prefix *Royal*, in recognition of the town's long association with royalty since the early days of its fame as a spa. The Council was keen to adopt this idea and voted to send a formal petition to Edward VII. The original proposal was that the town should be renamed *Royal Kentish Spa*, but the king preferred *Royal Tunbridge Wells*, and this was the name formally granted on 8 April 1909. The *Courier's* enthusiastic report concluded by saying: *We trust that the prosperity and importance of Tunbridge Wells as the Royal Kentish Health Resort will be enhanced by the honour which has been done it.*

Royal visitors to Tunbridge Wells

The royal connections of Tunbridge Wells go back to the earliest days of its fame as a spa. Henrietta Maria came in 1629, and spent six weeks encamped with her courtiers on Tunbridge Wells Common.

Charles II and Queen Katharine came in 1663 and subsequently. They are said to have stayed at Mount Ephraim House, with the main body of their household on the Common as before. The Duke of York (later James II) made his first visit in 1670, when he popularised the High Rocks, along with his daughters Mary and Anne, both later queens. Princess Anne came on several occasions up to 1699, and a grove was planted on the Common to celebrate her coronation in 1702.

Eighteenth century royal visitors included George II (as Prince of Wales), his sons Frederick Prince of Wales, William Duke of Cumberland, and Frederick's sons the Dukes of York and Gloucester. Although the Prince Regent (later George IV) preferred Brighton, he was seen at Tunbridge Wells on a number of occasions, as were his sister Princess Sophia, and his brothers Frederick Duke of York, Ernest Duke of Cumberland, and Augustus Duke of Sussex.

Most regular and popular of royal visitors were the Duchess of Kent and her daughter Princess (later Queen) Victoria, who came almost every year between 1826 and 1835. They usually stayed at Mount Pleasant House (now the Calverley Hotel), and the Princess much enjoyed her rides on the Common on her donkey named 'Flower'. The townsfolk planted the Royal Victoria Grove, still to be seen on the Common, to celebrate these visits.

After her accession, Queen Victoria returned to Tunbridge Wells on two occasions, in 1849 and 1876. Edward VII came as Prince of Wales in 1862 and 1881; in later years, he agreed to the Council's request in 1909 that the town be entitled to style itself 'Royal' on account of its long history of royal connections. Visits during the present century have included one by Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1928, and four by Elizabeth, Duchess of York and later Queen Mother, between 1932 and 1986. Diana, Princess of Wales, opened Royal Victoria Place in 1992.

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