

Great Britain on film

A large part of the enjoyment of any movie about British royalty or its government are the locations. Layered onto this is the intricate and often accurate use of period costume, make-up and set design. Here, FOCUS provides a round-up of some of the buildings and other locations used in a number of modern classics from this genre.

Kensington Palace and Gardens

Famously known as the childhood home of Queen Victoria, Kensington is typically featured or mentioned in any movie about the great monarch. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are currently in residence in a private area of the palace, but you can explore the Queen's state-rooms and see what it would have been like to live there in the 1800s. There are also a number of exhibitions, including tributes to the Queen's many gowns and a model of the glass hall of the 1851 Great Exhibition. You cannot enter Princess Diana's staterooms, but there are several pieces of her wardrobe on display.

The Young Victoria (2009) – Before Victoria became one of the nation's greatest monarchs, she had to fight her way through the restrictions of her childhood, family and the men in power around her. The film starts in Kensington Palace (although actually filmed at Ham House in Richmond-upon-Thames in southwest London), stressing how much it was like a prison. Victoria's mother was overprotective, prompting young Victoria's resentment of the restrictions. As Victoria moves into young adulthood and with the help of her beloved friend and consort, Albert,

she discovers her strength and secures not only her throne, but the love and respect of her government and people.

Emily Blunt shines in her portrayal of the young monarch, and Rupert Friend quietly wins us over as her beloved Prince Albert. The film won an Academy Award for Best Costume Design. It is a romanticised version of Victoria's life; for example, Albert throws himself in the path of a bullet to save his wife during an attempted assassination, and Victoria thought of Lord Melbourne, portrayed as a potential suitor in the film, as more of a father figure. These dramatic additions aside, the narrative is largely accurate.

Buckingham Palace

The residence of all the royal families since Queen Victoria in 1837, Buckingham Palace is often at the top of every tourist's must-see list. Open year-round are the Queen's Gallery and the Royal Mews, and when the queen is not in residence, you can tour a select number of rooms. Every other day, you can also watch the changing of the guard, a large ceremony held just inside the gates, but get there early to get close enough to see anything!

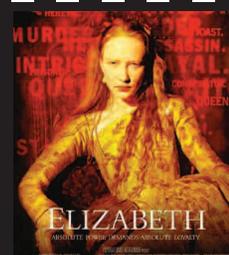
The Queen (2006) – When Princess Diana died, the UK was thrown into mourning. One aspect that seemed to upset people was the silence of the monarchy.

At the heart of 'The Queen' is the question, how much do you maintain traditional protocol when your nation is demanding open grief? Helen Mirren portraying the monarch, earned an Oscar for her performance. Michael Sheen also gave

an accurate and brilliant depiction of then-prime minister, Tony Blair. Neither Downing Street nor Buckingham Palace criticised the film, which although slightly romanticised to add drama, is mostly accurate. People commented that the Queen would not have broken down because she was too stiff-lipped a personality. The film asks whether the Queen unsettled the monarchy by her actions. Some would say she did, but she also managed to maintain the love and respect of her people by respecting their wishes, and that's the core of what the movie is addressing. The movie was filmed at Castle Fraser and Blairquhan Castle for the Balmoral scenes, Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire for the final scene at the palace, and at Buckingham Palace for the exterior shots. The film's makers also blended movie footage with live footage from news reports and interviews made after the Princess's death.

Houses of Parliament

These buildings are privy to many of the most important decisions that are made regarding Great Britain and its relationship with rest of the world. Westminster Hall was built in 1097, but the Houses of Parliament were built in the mid-1800s. Tours are available daily, even into the House of Commons and House of Lords when not in session, and you can walk the same route as the Queen takes when she addresses Parliament. This runs down the long hallway where bills are transferred between Houses, and past the statues and memorials to some the nation's greatest prime ministers.



The Iron Lady (2011) – As Margaret Thatcher ages, she begins to lose her grip on reality, but through a series of flashbacks and imaginary conversations with her deceased husband, Denis, she is able to come to terms with her life, family and legacy as Britain's first female prime minister.

As most of the plot takes place in Thatcher's mind, only the flashbacks can be analysed for accuracy, and it is for the most part an excellent portrayal of her. Again, there are some romanticised details; for instance, when Thatcher first enters the House of Commons, she appears to be the only blue suit in a sea of men. There certainly were a few other women in government at the time, but this portrayal adds to the sense of isolation that she must have felt. Otherwise, Meryl Streep's Oscar-winning performance of the woman who would never compromise was not only brilliant, but inspirational. The movie was filmed mostly on a sound stage in Wimbledon, and the Parliament scenes were filmed at Manchester Town Hall in Greater Manchester.

Westminster Abbey

The building itself is of a beautiful Gothic design, the steps worn completely down from all the feet that have crossed their thresholds. Not only is it an active church, but the Abbey is a large memorial ground for more than 3,300 monarchs, poets, church leaders, government officials, scientists and more. It is where monarchs can be married and where all have been coronated since 1066.

The King's Speech (2010) – Thrown into the monarchy when his brother abdicated in one of England's biggest controversies, George VI lacked confidence because of his enormous stutter. Through the help of his speech therapist, he was however able to lead the nation through the First World War.

Colin Firth won Best Actor at the Academy Awards, Golden Globes and

BAFTAs for his portrayal of the King; Geoffrey Rush won Best Supporting Actor as his therapist, Lionel Logue and Helena Bonham Carter secured Best Supporting Actress at the BAFTAs for her role as the Queen. The film also won Best Motion Picture at the Academy Awards! It falters however on the accuracy scale. The King's stutter was an annoyance, but not a hindrance! The whole sequence at the end where crowds are gathered in front of the Palace to congratulate the king on his speech was completely fictionalised, Winston Churchill is depicted supporting the abdication whereas he violently opposed it, and George and Edward were actually great friends and not rivals. The film remains however an inspiring story, and Firth and Rush's performances were extraordinary.

Halton House in Buckinghamshire was used as the King's office at the Palace, Draper's Hall in Broadgate for his speech, Ely Cathedral stood in for Westminster Abbey and the coronation rehearsals, and Regent's Park was where Logue and the King have their falling out.

Tower of London

Today, the Tower of London is better known as home to the Crown Jewels, poppies and the Beefeaters' ravens, but it was once a fortress built by William the Conqueror; a zoo for exotic beasts, the site for many famous beheadings (including Lady Jane Grey and Anne Boleyn), the site for many famous battles including the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, and most famously as a prison, holding Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I, Guy Fawkes, the Twin Princes and so many more.

Elizabeth (1998) – The Virgin Queen was bound by her superiors, culture and even friends, but her journey to break free of those chains is inspirational.

Cate Blanchett inspires as the rising Queen employing all her strength and grace in this beautiful drama. It is however heavily romanticised. Among the embellishments are the facts that: the Duke of

Norfolk did not become a key figure until Elizabeth had been on the throne for years and he was executed for treason 14 years later; the poisoned dress never existed; Robert Dudley was a friend, only rumoured to be a lover; the Queen knew about his first marriage because she'd attended his wedding; the assassination on the river was not an attempt at all but rather a salute to the Queen that misfired and Elizabeth did not become known as the Virgin Queen early on but rather 20 years into her reign. Middle Temple Hall in Holborn, London, was used for one of the meetings with Norfolk, and is possibly where it actually occurred. There were also many castles used for interior and exterior shots, including Bamburgh, Alnwick, Aydon, Bolton, Leeds, Warkworth and Raby for the river pageant.

Shakespeare's Globe

This is not the Globe of Shakespeare's day, but it is famous for its almost completely accurate design work, down to using the same kind of wood! It is not only a marvel to behold, but is also an active theatre, performing anything related to Shakespeare or the playwrights of his day. The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse adjacent to the Globe performs accurate productions as a Jacobean theatre, complete with wooden seats and completely lit by candlelight. Down the street is the Rose Theatre, built on the remains of the actual Rose stage, where smaller and more intimate productions can be experienced, and the wooden remains of the stage can still be seen!

Shakespeare in Love (1998) – With his career beginning to stumble as a result of a writer's block, William Shakespeare finds himself confronted with a personal commission from Queen Elizabeth. He triumphs with the help and love of cross-dressing Viola de Lesseps, who inspires his greatest play of all time, Romeo and Juliet.

Ironically, this film was released the same year as Elizabeth. How did a less accurate





depiction of a story from the Elizabethan Era and starring three of the same actors win the bigger Academy Awards (picture, screenplay, leading actress, supporting actress, music, costume)? Though comedic, the characters are well-researched (especially Geoffrey Rush's Phillip Henslowe) and the interior design was much more accurate. It is suggested that Shakespeare was inspired by Christopher Marlowe, which is referenced in the film, and the rumour that his marriage to Anne Hathaway was not the happiest is completely explored as the plot centres around Will's affair with Viola, a woman who dresses as a boy so she can act. This is also a nod to the fact that Shakespeare was supposedly gay. The film serves more as a blend of facts and rumours about Shakespeare. The movie was filmed in Shepperton

Studios in Surrey, Broughton Castle in Oxfordshire, Whitehall in Westminster, Holkham Hall in Norfolk and Barnes in London for the river scenes.

Honourable mention

Balmoral Castle, Scotland – This gorgeous estate was first purchased and remodeled by Prince Albert and has remained a private residence for the royal family since. It is a working farm and forest, popular for hunting, and offers a great getaway from the tight quarters and stress of London. Tours of the castle and estate are available throughout most of the year, and cottages on the site are available for rent.

Mrs Brown (1997) – When Queen Victoria lost Albert, she lost everything. The only thing that saved her and the nation from the depths of her depression was her personal servant John Brown. Their friendship was powerful, but ignited a whirlwind of controversy.

Scandalous as the story was, the film boasts the formidable acting talents of Dame Judi Dench and Billy Connolly, for which Dench won both BAFTA and Golden Globe Awards. Whether Victoria

and Brown were actually in love will always remain a question, but their friendship was powerful and uncontested. There is rumour they were actually married, but the film leaves all this up to the viewer's imagination. The royal family was initially against the idea of exposing the scandal, but the filmmakers focused on the beauty of the friendship. The film was well received, and the only real obvious inaccuracy is that Victoria was part of the Anglican-Presbyterian church and would never have called a mass for her son. It takes place mostly in the Highlands, where Victoria recuperated from her depression, but the shots of Balmoral Castle were actually filmed at Perth and Kinross and Taymouth Castle.

Casey Dey is an intern at FOCUS Magazine, living a dream come true in London. An American student on study abroad, she hopes one day to return as a journalist and start her own café. She can be reached at cdey@puget-sound.edu or found wandering the streets of her favourite city.



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