

POSTCARD

Cliveden House



As the Queen celebrates her Platinum Jubilee, **Laura French** heads to Cliveden House to explore the royal history of one of England's most iconic manor hotels

Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, Winston Churchill, president Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi, the Queen – almost every illustrious name in history has graced the floors of Cliveden House, the lavish country estate set amid 376 acres of National Trust land in Berkshire on the edge of the Chiltern Hills, nine miles outside of Windsor.

First built by the Duke of Buckingham in the 17th century as a gift to his mistress, the Grade I listed building is where Meghan Markle stayed the night before her wedding to Prince Harry. It's also where the Beatles filmed some of *Help!* and where John Profumo (then secretary of state for war) began a notorious affair with Christine Keeler.

History is everywhere you look, and as I enter the reception of this 47-room house, I can't help feeling a little like a royal myself (aside from the fact we've just got out of a 15-year-old Toyota Yaris, which now sits sandwiched between a Porsche and a Ferrari).

We're led to our room through a hallway lined with classical sculptures and find ourselves gawking at an elaborate four-poster bed set in the corner of a huge, wood-panelled suite, complete with aristocratic paintings, antique furnishings and a giant, roaring fireplace.

Much of the decor is inspired by Lady Astor, the first woman in British parliament and the wife of Viscount Waldorf Astor who bought the house in 1893. Guests can stay in Lady Astor's former suite, or head to the spa to sample the Nancy fragrance, named in her honour.

On the outside, it's all just as impressive; there's a large parterre where rectangular hedges frame immaculate flower beds, an oriental-inspired water garden set around a glistening pond and a yew tree maze.

We wander through the woods down to the Thames and admire the three-bedroom Spring Cottage, where Queen Victoria used to come for afternoon tea.

Later on we indulge in the hotel's new Platinum Jubilee Afternoon Tea, sampling savoury pastries, sandwiches and cakes inspired by the UK and Ireland. Highlights include a Welsh rarebit choux pastry, a mini potato and truffle scone and a melt-in-the-mouth chocolate biscuit cake inspired by the Queen's favourite treat – all washed down with a glass of Laurent-Perrier (when in Cliveden).

Somehow we still have space for dinner a few hours later, scoffing truffle risotto, venison and an indulgent chocolate delicie, finished off with a 'Cliveden 66' cocktail made with Belvedere vodka, Veuve Clicquot and – wait for it – 24-carat gold. If this is how royals live, I need a new job (and possibly a bigger belt). Take me back, immediately. **TW**



BOOK IT

Rooms start at £445 per night (room only). The Platinum Jubilee Afternoon Tea costs £45 per person or £62 with champagne. clivedenhouse.co.uk

FROM TOP: The impressive parterre; Platinum Jubilee Afternoon Tea

PICTURE: National Trust

