

## My favourite historical site

By Mr. Gray

The Palace of Versailles is not only a building that has seen much change in its 400-year history, but also is seen as a symbol that represents and links both lavish splendour and bloody terror, with celebration and pinnacles of power to disgraced and humiliating downfall.

Starting out life as a modest hunting lodge a few miles from Paris, the Sun King, Louis XIV, expanded and transformed the smallest of buildings into a sprawling palace complex, with 2300 rooms in the 'main house'; 9km<sup>2</sup> of gardens, and two further smaller palaces within its grounds.

Versailles at its peak showed the disconnect between France's absolute monarchs of the Ancien Régime, who would heavily tax the French people to uphold their extravagant lifestyles, and the poor and starving people of France who were forced to eat grass as years of famine spread through the country.

Following this, Versailles witnessed her bloodiest episode following the French Revolution, which started in the palace's tennis courts. King and Queen were publicly executed by La Guillotine, and the palace was looted and stripped of her fixtures and fittings during the Terror period in France's history.

Out of the Terror, like a phoenix rising again, Versailles became prominent once more following the overturn of Napoleon's Republic and the reinstating of the royal family.

The Unification of Germany in 1871 occurred under the golden ceiling of Versailles' famous Hall of Mirrors - symbolically giving the new Germany a sense of belonging, power and dominance. However, this pride did not last too long, as the same Hall of Mirrors was chosen to be the setting where Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles following the First World War; the ultimate humiliation.

If you would like to learn more about the Palace of Versailles, visit:

<https://en.chateauversailles.fr/>