



Public view: George IV as a gross voluptuary

## Royal archives show Prinny's cultural side

By RAY CLANCY

GEORGE IV's love of wine and his penchant for ageing mistresses ensured him a place in popular history as a degenerate king, but the good points of his reign are to be highlighted in an exhibition at Buckingham Palace later this year.

Material from the royal archives, never seen in public before, provide a picture of a glorious past in which George III's corpulent eldest son, who was Prince of Wales then prince regent before becoming king in 1820, was a patron and connoisseur of the arts.

The king is remembered for his tremendous appetite for money, food, and women. After particular

periods of excess he had to mount his horse using a trolley and pulley system, but he was also a great collector, according to the exhibition, which opens at the Queen's Gallery on March 22.

George, born in 1762, suffered the hardships of a particularly strict childhood and in his later years rebelled against his early life. Because of his father's madness he became prince regent in 1810, succeeded to the throne 10 years later and reigned for a decade.

His first affair is said to have occurred with an actress when he was aged 18. He was always in debt and married Princess Caroline of Brunswick in 1795 in return for Parliament paying his

debts of £650,000. He later tried to divorce her, which led to a national scandal and her death in 1821 ended an unfortunate episode in his reign. When George died he left bundles of letters from the 18 women he had loved.

The exhibition, the first of its kind, gives a fresh perception on the monarch described in *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* as "an undutiful son, a bad husband and a callous father". It demonstrates how George filled Carlton House in Pall Mall, his London home, with priceless paintings and furniture.

He is portrayed as a patron of English artists, including Reynolds, Stubbs, Hogarth and Gains-

borough. He gathered unrivalled collections of French furniture and porcelain, English gold and silver plate, and Russian imperial swords. Many of the finest pieces will be on display.

The exhibiton does not ignore his excesses. It chronicles the great fetes and lavish parties held at Carlton House. The day after one party George opened the house to the public and a mob descended filled with curiosity.

The *Morning Chronicle* reported: "About a dozen females were so completely disrobed in the squeeze, they were obliged to send home for clothes, before they could venture out into the streets."