

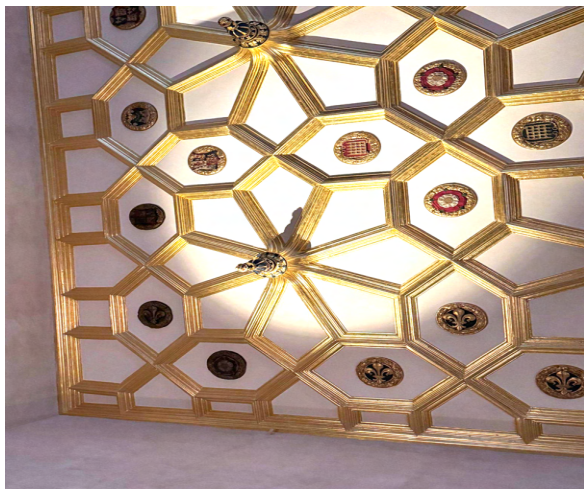
HAMPTON COURT PALACE



On Wednesday 13th of December 2023, I was given permission to have a day off school because I have a passion for the Tudors after studying them first in Year 3. I had written a letter to Tracy Borman (Historian, Author and Joint Chief Curator of all the Historic Royal Palaces) to ask if she could show me around Hampton Court, as I had never been before. Having met her a couple of times having read two of her books, she very kindly agreed.

The Watching Chamber

In the watching chamber, the ceiling was adorned with roses with the Tudor rose and Jane Seymour's crest (Henry VIII's 3rd wife) however, the originals were made out of leather and only 3 remain as they kept falling down in the Victorian times, so were replaced with plaster replicas.



The Tudor roses on the ceiling in the Watching Chamber

Courtiers often had to wait for a long time for the King to emerge from his private apartments, would sit on cushions and play games for hours. The door to the right as you enter was the most important door in Hampton Court, as it led directly to the King's apartments and where he appeared after long hours of waiting.

The Great Hall

On entry, there is an ordinary looking wood-panelled wall, but, on closer inspection, there is an intertwined H and A. In the time of Anne Bolyen, the grand palace had not been finished being built. When Anne was executed in 1536, Henry wanted every trace of her removed. Although, they forgot to remove one and now, we question if they actually "forgot" to remove the carving at all.

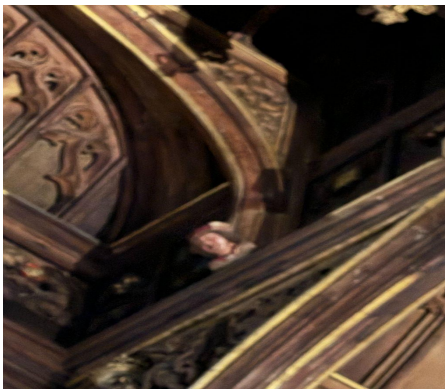


Henry and Anne's intertwined initials



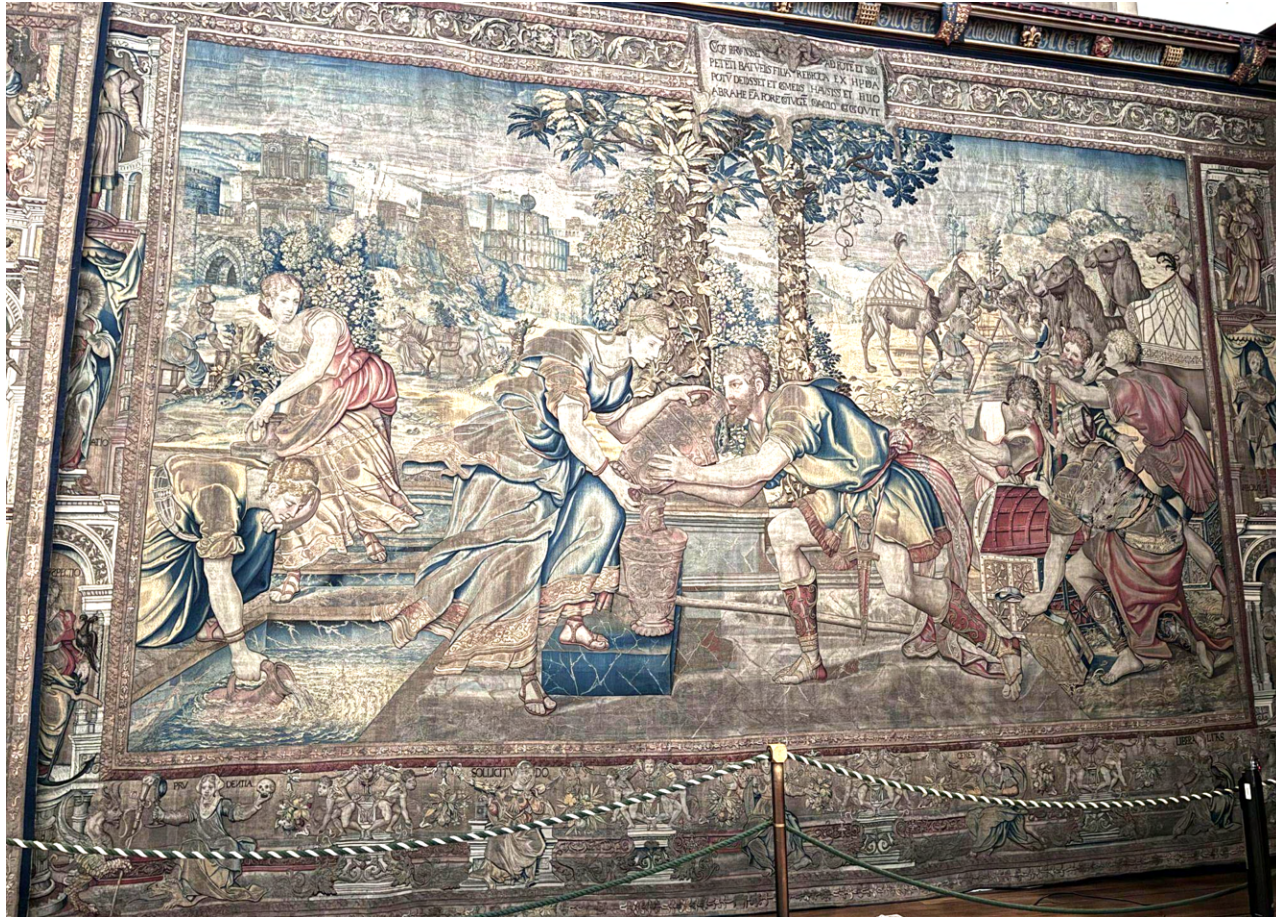
Sitting at the king and queen's table

In the eaves of the Great Hall, there are tiny heads staring down at the 500,000 visitors that pass through the doors of this spectacular palace yearly. The heads were there to symbolise that although the King may not have been there in person, he was always listening for anything traitorous said amongst his courtiers. This is where the term “eavesdropper” comes from.



One of the eavesdroppers

Now faded and not very striking, the once lavish, once rich embroidered tapestries came from Flanders and hung in both the Great Hall and Watching Chamber; they are the second most valuable item in the Royal collection after the crown jewels.



An example of one of the numerous tapestries

Paintings

Hampton Court Palace is home to many paintings. One of them, possibly the most famous of Henry VIII, was there and apparently Henry loved his calves and always had them on display in white stockings. That all changed though, because on January 24th, 1536, he had an almost fatal jousting accident, where he was unconscious for several hours. His leg later became ulcerated and, in older life, made him unable to walk.



The painting of HenryVIII

There was also a painting of a little boy, around 8 years of age, tapping on the windows of the court. This was painted to show that children were considered adults from the age of 6 and forced to work from the young age of 8.



A child working at the Tudor court

The Boleyn ring

This ring, only discovered recently, probably belonged to George and Thomas Boleyn, Anne Boleyn's father and brother. The ring was so large that historians suspect that it was worn on a man's thumb, over a glove. It bears the Boleyn crest; a bull's head and was used to stamp and seal letters. If you look hard, you would also see some incredible, intricate details; stars barely 3 millimetres and encircling the crest, painted triangles, there is also a R but it is so tiny that it is not visible to the eye.



The Privy Chamber

The Privy Chamber was a place where all of the important decisions were decided. In this room sat some of the most influential people of Tudor England. The Chamber was the setting where some of the key events in Henry VIII's life- his fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves from Germany and, not even a year later to divorce her and where he chose to execute his fifth wife, Catherine Howard- were all discussed and decided in that room. The bright, decorated floor has been described as garish and ludicrous, yet historians suggest that the floor is almost exactly how it would have been in the Tudor times; everything a riot of colours. Not a space left untouched.



The King's seat in the Privy Chamber

The Haunted Gallery

With doors leading off to the Chapel Royal and The Privy Chamber, the haunted gallery is probably the most notorious part of the whole sprawling palace. Legend has it that, when Catherine Howard discovered that she was going to be executed, she ran down the hallway, thinking that Henry, her husband, was in the Chapel Royal, so she could plead her innocence to try and change his mind. She reached the door, only to be led back by her guards, screaming and uncontrollable.

This one gallery has the most reported “incidents” and faintings than any other place in Britain. Tracy Borman once was in there -alone- at night, standing in a particular spot when the temperature suddenly dropped. As she was standing near windows she checked for any draughts. None. As quickly as the cold spell had come on, it went, returning to normal. She reported this to her colleague, and she said, “you don’t know how many people have reported the exact same thing, even the place.”



The Haunted Gallery

The Chapel Royal

A place full of wonder, The Chapel Royal was mostly destroyed by William of Orange and Mary (1650-1702) with their baroque style because the magnificent Tudor home was old-fashioned and uncomfortable. Sights we would marvel at today were demolished. Thankfully though, the couple ran out of money halfway through, so the palace was saved.

Despite that, the infamous, painted, star-like ceiling remains, and in one of the pews graffiti etched into the wood by soldiers in the Crimean war who were bored of church. There are names, the army crest, even an elephant!

Once, there was a striking stained-glass window with figures of HenryVIII, Catherine of Aragon (HenryVIII's first wife) and Thomas Wolsey- Henry's close advisor and personal friend. The window was removed by William and Mary, then later destroyed in the commonwealth while the country was under the reign of Anne, then bricked up.

The Apartments of Grace and Favour

Ladies and lords favoured by the current monarch were invited to live in Hampton Court in the apartments of Grace and Favour. This tradition started in the Victorian time and the homes have only recently been uninhabited. The inhabitants had to pay little or no rent. Just like the rest of Hampton Court, these apartments have had a turbulent history- in 1986, on Easter day, a fire broke out, badly damaging the state rooms.

Thankfully, they managed to put the blaze out before it spread to the rest of the historic palace although Lady Gale, an occupant of the Grace and Favour, sadly perished in the disaster.

PRIVATE ACCESS

When I visited Hampton Court with Tracy Borman, I was privileged to be shown around some rooms that are off-limits to the public.

The Bayne Tower

Until recently, people thought that HenryVIII's bedroom was destroyed, but it has been discovered that the Bayne Tower, now which has been converted into offices, was once his private chambers.

Three stories high, it towers over the iconic, red-brick wall. The ground floor was solely dedicated to Henry's clothes, with every single one dripping with gems, the second

floor was his bedroom, the third, the hardest to reach, was all of his valuable items, which he had a lot of.



The Bayne Tower

The Haunted Staircase

Haunted by the grey lady, in the Tudor times known as Sybil Penn, nursed Elizabeth I back to health from smallpox, a deadly disease that killed many people. She then proceeded to catch the illness from the young princess and later died there.

She was laid to rest peacefully in Hampton church, only in 1800, her coffin was struck by lightning and it is said that her spirit returned to the palace, haunting the stairs in a gloomy, dank part of the once royal home.



The Haunted Staircase

The Unseen Room

Up the haunted staircase, there is a normal looking room, painted a soft pastel green, used for conferences and training, but, 486 years ago this would have been very different. The room would have been hung with drapes, a huge fire roaring, the scent of herbs sweetly aromatising the room. There would have been no light, because the window would have had numerous velvet drapes hung and all of the keyholes were stuffed with cloth. This was because Jane Seymour was giving birth to HenryVIII's long-awaited and hoped-for son, EdwardVI, the reason why there was no light was, back in the Tudors, any ray of natural light was considered unhealthy during childbirth.

Women had to go into isolation 1 month before their baby was due and they could only have women attend to them. All of this paid off though, as Jane Seymour provided the happiest event of HenryVIII's life.

Disaster struck however, on the 24th of October 1537, Henry's favourite wife suddenly died. Only 12 days after the birth of Edward, she was left weak and ill, having to miss the christening of her only child.

The bigger the fireplace meant the greater one's stature at court. As Henry loved Jane Seymour, he gave her royal apartments with probably one of the largest fireplaces in Hampton Court Palace. The room has the best view of the intricate astronomy clock, which tells the time, day of the year, the position of the sun in the zodiac, the date and the phase of the moon which Jane sadly never would have laid eyes on. This room was probably the most significant room in Hampton Court and it was incredibly special to be allowed into what is now just a training room.



The training room - one of the most important rooms in history!



View of the Astronomy Clock



Standing in the huge fireplace

Final thoughts

Fascinating, incredible, breathtaking, Hampton Court Palace in three words.

Thank you to:

- Mrs Chaplin for introducing me to the Tudors
- Mrs Wilde for allowing me to take time off of school
- Mrs Reed for being so enthusiastic
- Tracy Borman for showing me around and for inspiring me



By Emily Rysdale