



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Historic Royal Palaces' Research Strategy, 2022-2027

Research at Historic Royal Palaces

Research at Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) takes many forms. From the history of our unique palaces and the people who lived and worked in them to world-renowned conservation science and innovative public engagement methodologies, Historic Royal Palaces leads and collaborates on a wide variety of research projects with academic, cultural and industry partners.

HRP is responsible for six magnificent and historically significant royal palaces: HM Royal Palace and Fortress of the Tower of London (a UNESCO World Heritage Site); Hampton Court Palace; Kensington Palace; Banqueting House, Whitehall (the sole surviving part of the historic Palace of Whitehall); Kew Palace, Queen Charlotte's Cottage and the Pagoda (within Royal Botanic Gardens Kew); and Hillsborough Castle and Gardens, the monarch's official residence in Northern Ireland.

Our collections include the Arts Council England designated Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, archaeological finds, and architectural drawings. Many of the items on display at our palaces which we undertake research on, including the Crown Jewels, are part of the Royal Collection.

Research is the process by which we deepen our knowledge and understanding of our properties and collections, providing the evidence and expertise to make informed decisions and interventions, develop unique, diverse and memorable audience experiences, and face the societal challenges of today.

With millions of UK and international visitors each year to each of our sites, established learning and communities' programmes, and a growing online audience, HRP offers the opportunity to generate significant and lasting research impact with national and global reach.

Historic Royal Palaces is an Independent Research Organisation (IRO), a status awarded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in recognition of our research activity which allows us to receive UKRI funding and co-supervise PhD students.

Research Vision

At Historic Royal Palaces our vision is that authoritative research should underpin and inform everything we do as part of our core function to look after, interpret, and engage audiences with the buildings, landscapes, and collections in our care.



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

We want to bring our palaces and their stories to life by exploring new and diverse perspectives alongside the more familiar histories for which they are known, tackle conservation threats and the impact of climate change by experimenting with innovative technologies and scientific techniques and enhance the visitor experience through inclusive and inspiring interactions designed to stir every spirit.

Priority Research Themes

In order to support the aims of our research vision, we have developed four cross-cutting priority research themes across all our areas of research:

Identities and Perceptions

The multiple personal and constructed identities of British monarchs and members of the royal family are key to understanding how they were perceived historically and by contemporary audiences today. Our objective is to investigate how individual kings and queens wished themselves to be portrayed through political, intellectual, scientific, and cultural patronage – particularly as expressed in the built environment of the palaces and the objects within them. We also look to explore the identities of the palaces and collections themselves, what role they played in national consciousness in the past, and how different audiences identify with them today.

Materiality and Environment

Developing our knowledge of the materiality of our buildings, landscapes and collections through scientific, archival, architectural and archaeological research is at the core of HRP's key ambition to give the palaces 'a future as bright as their past'. We aim to unlock the fabrication and environments of the past, utilising cross-disciplinary methodologies including archaeology, traditional crafts, scientific analysis, and digital visualisations to support innovation sensory audience experiences and develop sustainable approaches for the management of our heritage assets and their protection from future challenges.

Inclusivity and Diverse Heritages

At HRP we are dedicated to delivering inclusive research which tells the whole story of the palaces and those who resided within them, unearthing hidden histories and untold stories to give a voice to underrepresented communities and narratives. We seek to explore new perspectives by undertaking inclusive, collaborative research with a broad range of public audiences to reinterpret our spaces and collections, ensuring that 'everyone's in'. Subject areas within this theme include diverse socio-economic narratives, non-white British histories, women's history, LGBTQ+ and non-binary gender identities, physical disability and mental illness.



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Interactions and Relationships

Interactions take many forms. Our historical research focuses on how individuals interacted with each other within the environment of the palaces and with the buildings themselves, including questions around the subjects of service, privacy and emotions. It addresses how monarchs interacted both with their people through ritual, ceremony and royal progresses and globally through trade, diplomacy, Empire and the slave trade. Today we seek to understand and enhance the varying interactions of our visitors with our sites, harnessing digital technology and emerging media to explore new ways of engaging audiences in a heritage environment.

Objectives

Our ambition during the early years of this strategy will be tempered by the reduced resourcing of our re-structure, but in order to achieve the HRP Research Vision, we aim to meet the following objectives:

1. Strategically plan our projects and programmes to deliver our Priority Research Themes, with particular focus in the early years of the plan on the research and dissemination of inclusive histories and engagement with diverse communities and global audiences.
2. Continue to grow our distinct status and research credibility as a non-government funded IRO and generate research income by leading and collaborating on projects supported by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and other funders across a wide range of disciplines.
3. Nurture and train the next generation of research professionals through the delivery of our joint MA in Heritage Management with Queen Mary University of London, the co-supervision of PhD students, scholarships and placements, and the creation of post-doctoral research fellowships.
4. Communicate our research to a wide range of public audiences through exhibitions, talks, tours and events, the interpretation of buildings and collections, learning and communities-based programming, digital outputs, and media activity.
5. Utilise scientific infrastructure and digital technologies to experiment with novel research methodologies, to develop innovative and sustainable pathways to facilitate access to our sites and collections while increasing resilience to environmental risks.
6. Identify questions and research opportunities around the tangible and intangible heritage assets under our care informed by the specialist knowledge and expertise of our staff members, the associated public engagement, conservation, and archaeological need and priorities.



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

7. Increase our national and international research reputation through the dissemination of our findings in academic publications, conference papers and seminars, and participation in academic and professional networks, informing policy development and future research planning.
8. Advance our relationships with existing and new academic, heritage and industry partners around our priority research themes through events and programmes to encourage creative ideas and approaches, including a greater focus on international collaborations.
9. Strengthen our capabilities and capacity by developing a vibrant, inclusive, and highly collaborative internal research culture across the organisation, promoting shared knowledge between departments and greater interdisciplinarity.
10. Support the exchange of knowledge and expertise with peers and potential collaborators, increase physical access to our collections, and measure the impact of our research within existing capacity and when possible explore ways to expand this, including through external grant funding.

Key Research Areas

HRP undertakes research across a wide variety of disciplines and professions within the organisation. Five of our key area of activities are:

Royal History and Palace Lives

The story of the British monarchy, individual kings and queens, and the royal court and household sit at the heart of historical research at HRP. We address the role of monarchs as rulers and their role in government, including their interactions with their subjects at home and globally with nations and people across the world. We aim to unveil the human stories behind the official narratives, exploring personal relationships and interests, mental and physical health. Just as importantly, we look beyond monarchs to all those who came into contact with and whose lives were affected by the palaces.

Key research strands include monarchs and monarchy in science, trade and culture in the early modern period; royal LGBTQ+ histories; self-fashioning and image construction; ritual and ceremony; diverse Tower histories; royal progresses; imperial gardens; royal involvement in Britain's emerging Empire.



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Heritage Science and Collection Care

HRP has a track record of national and international multi-disciplinary projects underpinned by scientific research. A primary area of research has been the preservation of historic textiles, particularly tapestries while more recently focus has expanded toward the technical examination and analysis of paintings and murals. We are also active in climate change and environmental risk management research developing innovative preventative conservation strategies including deploying smart technologies to protect our collections or developing strategies to protect Reigate stone at the Tower of London.

Key research strands include Banqueting House Rubens ceiling paintings; Baroque wall paintings; Hampton Court tapestries; Tower of London Reigate Stone; manufacture techniques and preservation of textiles – weighted silk; State Royal Beds; climate change and environmental risk management.

Art History and Material Culture

The palaces in the care of HRP house a treasure trove of art, from paintings to ceramics, tapestries, furniture and furnishings. Most of this was collected or specifically created for display within the palaces and in the nineteenth-century Kensington and Hampton Court were opened to visitors primarily as public art galleries. Our research is targeted at understanding the creation, purpose and reception of art as part of decorative schemes, which were often designed to evoke royal power. As curators of the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, we specialise particularly in fashion and dress. We also have a long-standing expertise in the preparation and consumption of food at the royal court, combining archival research with onsite experimentation.

Key research strands include court dress and fashion; the Crown Jewels; medieval wall painting; baroque mural schemes; Tudor history painting; portraiture and the changing cultural experience of 'beauty'; food preparation and consumption; chocolate kitchens; royal artwork inventories, and the interaction of the public with art across all periods.

Architecture and Archaeology

As sites of living history, HRP are continuously undertaking research to further understand and record our below ground archaeological deposits and exceptional collection of standing buildings and their vanished predecessors. We aim to understand the palaces within the context of their landscape and in comparison to lost and surviving royal sites elsewhere, and the politics of their design and



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

decoration. We experiment with the recreation of ephemeral structures, employing traditional techniques to increase our knowledge of the palaces and their past.

Key research strands include portable palaces & temporary structures; lost palaces; digital recreation of historic spaces; politics and gender of public and private spaces; women in construction and craft trades; Grinling Gibbons; Hampton Court Tjouw screens, and Legges Mount.

Heritage Management and Public Engagement

HRP undertake reflective research into our interpretation and public engagement activities, including investigations into how various audiences interact with the palaces and our events and the long-term impact of their onsite and online experiences. We seek to understand and implement the best heritage management practices across the organisation, by understanding the history of palaces as visitor attractions and exploring the use of innovative immersive and experiential technologies in the future.

Key research strands include measuring audience impact; the Tower as a site of national commemoration; the history of heritage and visitors to the palace.