



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

KENSINGTON PALACE

CROWN TO COUTURE

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SCHOOL
AND COMMUNITY GROUP VISITS

SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

TOWER OF LONDON • HAMPTON COURT PALACE • BANQUETING HOUSE
KENSINGTON PALACE • KEW PALACE • HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Practical guidance for visiting Crown to Couture	6
Changes to the visitor experience	8
Ideas to explore before visiting Crown to Couture	9
Crown to Couture, route by route	12
Ideas to explore after visiting Crown to Couture	18
Contact information	19



INTRODUCTION

Crown to Couture is the largest exhibition ever staged at Kensington Palace, taking visitors on an immersive journey through the palace. There are over 200 objects showing the power of dress in the Georgian era and how it has inspired today's iconic red-carpet looks.

This guide has been designed to support teachers and community group leaders to prepare and deliver engaging visits for their classes and groups to Crown to Couture. This exhibition aims to dazzle visitors, with set designers transforming Kensington Palace's State Apartments into 'London's hottest catwalk.'

Crown to Couture is an exciting exhibition, one that introduces themes and narratives that have never been explored at Kensington Palace. However, the visitor experience may be challenging for groups. This guide aims to outline the visitor experience, helping teachers and groups leader prepare for the visit and engage their classes and groups before, during and after their visit.

CONTACT US

Historic Royal Palaces' Schools & Communities team is happy to offer additional support and advice to prepare for visits to all of our palaces.

For school visits, please contact: kensingtonlearning@hrp.org.uk

For community visits, please contact: communities@hrp.org.uk

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR VISITING CROWN TO COUTURE

Kensington Palace will be exceptionally busy and crowded from **5 April – 29 October 2023**. A press review of Crown to Couture from *The Times* stated that ‘[visitors] will flock in their thousands to this show.’

Planning and preparing is essential to making your group visit as enjoyable as possible.

BOOKING TICKETS

Pre-booking is essential for all visits to Kensington Palace.

For school visits, please visit our website to [book a session](#).

Community Access Scheme group visits can be booked using the online [CAS Group Visit Request Form](#).

Community Access Scheme ‘Free Visit’ cards will not be accepted at Kensington Palace during the time of this exhibition.

GETTING TO THE PALACE

COACH PARKING

Unfortunately, we do not have a car park for school visitors at Kensington Palace. If you plan to arrive by coach, the drop off point is **Orme Square Gate**. There is private coach parking available off Bayswater Road near the Palace.

Contact [Euro Car Parks](#) on **020 7563 3000** for prices and to book. This is a 10-15 minute walk from the palace.

MINIBUS / TAXI DROP OFF

We can organise a minibus drop off and collection at the Orangery for groups with access needs. Please contact a member of the Schools & Communities team to book this, with at least two weeks’ notice.

We will require the following information:

- Booking reference number
- Vehicle registration number
- Estimated time of arrival

TRAVELLING BY TUBE

The nearest tube stations are **Queensway** (Central Line) or **High Street Kensington** (District/Circle Lines).

From **Queensway** Underground Station (Central Line) to the palace entrance it is **728m (0.45 miles)** through Kensington Gardens, entering the park via Black Lion Gate. From **High Street Kensington** Underground Station (Circle & District Lines) to the palace entrance it is **765m (0.47 miles)** along Kensington High Street and into Kensington Gardens, entering the park via King’s Arms Gate.

TRAVELLING BY BUS

Routes 94, 148 and 274 stop along Bayswater Road.

Routes 9, 49, 52, 710, 452 stop along Kensington High Street.

ARRIVING AT THE PALACE

On arrival, the group leader should make themselves known to a team in the Ticket Office. They will alert the Schools & Communities team of your arrival, who will come and meet you in the Ticket Office.

BAG SEARCHES

When entering the palace, everyone must go through the bag search. This is necessary to ensure all our visitors are protected whilst they are on site. All searches are carried out by professionals trained to identify offending articles. Please encourage your students and group members to ‘pack light’, only bringing what is necessary.

We ask that group leaders follow this guidance to make the process as smooth and quick as possible:

- Arrive in plenty of time for your entry time slot.
- Be patient – the process can take time.
- Ask students and group members to take the process seriously.
- Follow all instructions given by staff.
- Do not bring things such as scissors, compasses, metal cutlery or sharp implements.
- Be aware that prohibited items are weapons, fireworks, smoke bombs, pepper spray, any article that is illegal to possess under UK law.

Additional guidance for School Visits is available in [Kensington Palace Schools’ Essential Information 2022/23](#). More [Security Information](#) can be found on our website.

CHANGES TO THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Crown to Couture is a linear route across Kensington Palace's three floors.

Kensington Palace will be busier than ever before:

- Groups must enter Kensington Palace together. Gather outside, entering only when everyone in the group is present.
- Latecomers will not be permitted to enter the palace.
- There may long queues at the start and throughout the Crown to Couture.
- Visitors will be continually moving through the exhibition.
- There are few places for people to stop and sit.
- Groups will be discouraged from gathering.
- Groups are unable to exit the exhibition until it is completed.
- Groups cannot be 'fast-tracked' through the exhibition or queue.
- Groups cannot re-enter the palace due to strict capacity guidelines.

POTENTIAL TRIGGERS

Crown to Couture is designed to dazzle, there are sensory elements which may cause disorientation:

- There is sound and music throughout the exhibition. This includes people shouting, talking and the sound of cameras clicking.
- There is dramatic lighting, with darkness and spotlights.
- There are projections and films.

Crown to Couture explores some more mature themes and might not be suitable for all ages.

More information about [Possible Risks and Hazards at Kensington Palace](#) can be found out our website.



IDEAS TO EXPLORE BEFORE VISITING CROWN TO COUTURE

Alongside the practical planning, it is a good idea to introduce the themes and narratives of Crown to Couture to exhibition to students and group members before visiting. This will support everyone to get the most out of the visitor experience.

Crown to Couture:

- Explores how clothing communicates messages
- Demonstrates the power of dress
- Celebrates craftsmanship, self-expression and confidence
- Investigates the politics of dress
- Celebrates Black excellence
- Makes connections across the centuries

WHAT IS COURT?

‘Going to Court’ in the Georgian era involved a visit to a royal palace. Once or twice a week, people attended a ‘Drawing Room’, a morning reception where they could meet the King, Queen or Prince of Wales. The grandest occasions were the balls to celebrate a royal birthday. At court, your dress and manners were crucial to getting noticed. A successful appearance could further your career, show your political standing, and secure your social position.

WHAT IS COUTURE?

Couture is the design and making of exclusive fashionable clothes to meet an individual’s specific requirements and measurements.

Alexander McQueen, Peter Dundas and Stella McCartney are some of the designers featured in this exhibition.

- What designers do you know?
- Why do people buy designer clothes today?



WHAT IS THE RED CARPET?

The red carpet is seen as an important global stage for fashionable, cultural, and even political statements. As public figures arrive at awards ceremonies and premieres, the spectacle of the red carpet tells its own story. Here celebrities can express their personality and sense of style, celebrate the artistry of established and emerging designers and shine a light on causes they support. Like the Georgian Court, red carpet appearances can make and shape careers.

Some of the fashions in Crown to Couture were first seen at the Academy Awards (Oscars), The Met Gala and The BRIT awards.

- What red carpet events are you aware of?
- Why do you watch or follow them?

THE RULES OF THE RED CARPET

Awards ceremonies, charitable events and premieres all roll out the red carpet to welcome their guests. Dress codes can vary depending on the purpose, environment, and the changing political and cultural mood of the time. Where once ‘Dinner Jackets and Ballgowns’ might have been stipulated, today you’re more likely to see ‘Inspirational and Aspirational’, as the Oscars advised in 2020.

The most important rule: come as the most fabulous version of yourself!

- What is one rule you follow to be the most fabulous you?
- What rule would you make for others to follow?

CROWN TO COUTURE, ROUTE BY ROUTE

The visitor route is one-way, over Kensington Palace's three floors.

All visitors will enter through the main entrance to Kensington Palace and go through the bag search.

All visitors will be directed to Crown to Couture first, taking the staircase on the right to the outside Terrace (it will be covered) before entering the Pigott Gallery.

PIGOTT GALLERY: INTRODUCTION AND PREPARATION

This route introduces visitors to Court to Couture, defining 'Court' in the 18th century and making comparisons to it and the Red Carpet today. We also meet the people who make the rules and the stylists who help people shape their looks.

RULE MAKERS

In the past and present people wishing to attend events follow dress codes, or rules.

In the 18th century Court, these rules were made by the Hanoverian monarchs. Women wore beautiful mantua dresses made of English silk and lappets, or two strips of lace which are worn on the head. Men wore heavily embroidered court suits with a hat, normally a tricorn hat. Occasionally other rules were put in place. As example, Queen Charlotte insisted that only Spitalfields silks were worn in court to support of the very important Spitalfields silk industry.

Today, dress codes vary, dependant on the purpose, environment, and the changing political and cultural mood of the time. Where once 'Dinner Jackets and Ballgowns' might have been stipulated, today you're more likely to see 'Inspirational and Aspirational' which was the dress code for the Oscars in 2020. Anna Wintour, editor of Vogue (America), sets the rules (theme and guest list) for the Met Gala annually, providing opportunities for being to be creative.

STYLISTS

Many celebrities turn to stylists to help create looks that deliver both visual spectacle and subtle messages. Stylists bring together all members of the creative team behind iconic red carpet looks. They ensure the final fit and appearance of a look is immaculate.

There was similar pressure for a court appearance. Many sought the expertise of the especially stylish actor Frances Abington. Frances was known for her impeccable fashion on the stage. She earned an extra £1500 (£230k today) a year for her 'judgement in blending what is beautiful with what is becoming'.

American actor, Billy Porter redefined red carpet dressing. His 2019 Oscars look, a tuxedo gown by Christian Siriano, was the catalyst to greater queer visibility and self-expression both on and off the red carpet. In 2020, he transformed the Met Gala red carpet into his stage, arriving on a litter carried by six shirtless, gold-clad men. You can see this in the Stone Hall.

Sam Ratelle is stylist and director the man behind these defining moments. Between 2018 and 2020, he collaborated on the looks that established Billy Porter as one of the most dynamic and influential figures on the red carpet.

There are portraits of both Frances Abington and Sam Ratelle on the wall.

GETTING READY

The final room of the Piggott gallery pulls together the unseen and smaller things that complete a look: undergarments, makeup and accessories.

UNDERGARMENTS

Undergarments are designed for cleanliness, as a foundation on which to layer clothes and occasionally as a decorative feature. Georgian corsetry was not about creating tiny waists. Rather it was designed to create clean lines and a sturdy base to support the weight and silhouette of court fashions.

Even the gentlemen at court adopted unusual techniques for making the most of their figures. Today, 'shapewear' is similarly intended to smooth the body as a foundation for clothing, and adhesive tape is freeing designers to create increasingly daring styles.

PREPARATION

Getting ready for a court event could take up to six hours. Wigs needed powdering, hair needed styling and makeup needed applying. This process was known as a “toilet”. It was common for women to invite guests to watch them get ready in the intimate setting of their dressing rooms. This was a great opportunity to grow social networks and engage in political gossip.

Today, millions of people are invited to watch the detailed and lengthy preparation for the red carpet in ‘behind the scenes’ content on social media. These intimate insights showcase the skill of vast teams of makeup artists, hairdressers, manicurists, stylists and designers involved in perfecting the spectacular looks seen in the world media.

STONE HALL: MAKING AN ENTRANCE

These are two examples of ‘making an entrance.’ The sedan chair belonged to Queen Charlotte. The litter carried by six men was Billy Porter’s arrival to the Met Gala in 2020.

The Courtiers arriving at the palace had to push through crowded streets of onlookers gathered to glimpse the extraordinary show of opulent dress. The biggest court events were royal birthdays when carriages and sedan chairs were occasionally toppled over amidst the excitement.

Today, celebrities arrive balancing precariously in their gowns in chauffeur driven vehicles. They are greeted by the flashing lights of photographers - instantly sharing the moment with a global audience. Getting noticed is the aim.

Your red carpet arrival needs to be dramatic – go big or go home!

ACCESSORIES

A courtier’s accessories were just as significant as their clothes. They were crafted from metals and precious stones which glinted in the candlelight. They were so essential for court that they were even faked and hired. Borrowed jewels suggested the political and social alliances of the wearer.

Today, red carpet dressing is all in the details. Jewellery and accessories can elevate and personalise a look, injecting character, humour or messages. Like in the 18th century, many jewels worn on the red carpet are loaned, linking celebrities to a particular brand. This unique environment provides a showcase for wearable art and exquisite craftsmanship.

Visitors exit the Piggott Gallery via stairs, continuing to the Stone Hall.

KING’S STATE APARTMENTS: THE MAIN EVENT

A successful debut can transform your career. Impact is everything. This route looks at how people used their opportunity in Court and the on the red carpet to shine.

SPECTACLE

George I created the King’s Gallery for large court gatherings. Only the finest craftsmanship and most sumptuous silks would ensure you caught the King’s attention in the packed crowds of guests. .

Today, the red carpet is the most influential stage for fashionable spectacle. Months of work go in to creating looks that awe and inspire. It is also a site for performance and self-expression, as the brightest stars of fashion, film, television, music and sport come together to showcase world-leading design before a global audience.

INFLUENCERS

In Queen Caroline’s Closet there is a display of portraits of influential people in the Georgian court. The 1700s saw the birth of ‘celebrity culture’ thanks to the success of printing houses.

Unlike today’s celebrities, very few of the people shown here would have been household names. They were, however, important figures

at court, achieving notoriety among a growing class of literate Britons and in the small gossip circle of court goers.

NETWORKING AND GOSSIP

One of the main reasons to go to court was for networking and gossiping. The best place to hear news about trade, politics or the private affairs of the royal family was in the Drawing Room. Here privileged courtiers gambled at cards, snacked on sweet things and drank luxurious wine and chocolate under glimmering candlelight. Once celebrities leave the red carpet and step inside, the global performance stops and the intimate performance of gossip and networking begins.

Listen in to the courtiers in the corner gossiping about the party guests.

POLITICS, FASHION, AND POWER

Palaces weren't just for pleasure, they were the setting for the serious business of monarchy. It was in the Council Chamber that the King met with his government. In this room, George II declared war against France in 1756.

Politicians attending court could signal their dissent or support through their clothes. Certain colours represented political groups and wearing foreign rather than British silks could be controversial. A subtle insult to the king was to wear last year's clothes to this year's birthday ball.

Today, many celebrities use the red carpet as a stage to voice protest or show their support for a particular community, cause or issue. Their dress and accessories can carry slogans or powerful messages that reach a global audience through the coverage of these high-profile events.

PERFORMANCE

The main entertainment at a court ball was the dancing. At Kensington Palace, the Cupola Room was the stage for complex dances which everyone who attended was expected to know. Every movement and gesture was examined closely.

A red-carpet appearance is similarly a performance. Many celebrities work with choreographers and practise their walks and poses to best showcase their outfits and create high impact photographs.

IDENTITY

King George and Queen Caroline were born and raised in Germany. When Queen Caroline decorated the Privy Chamber in the late 1720s, she chose paintings which emphasised the British ancestry of her husband. The busts in this room, of noted British poets, playwrights and thinkers were commissioned to emphasise her love of British culture and achievement.

On the red carpet, many celebrities use their dress to celebrate their heritage and identities.

BOW DOWN TO THE QUEEN

William Kent painted Apollo, the God of the Sun on the ceiling in this room for King George I. Just as the sun is centre of the universe, the King was the core of court life. The main reason to go to court was to meet the King or Queen. For most people coming to Kensington Palace this is where you would meet the King, sitting on his throne.

Today, celebrity is the centre of fashionable and cultural influence.

QUEEN'S STATE APARTMENTS: THE AFTER PARTY

The Queen's Apartments, like the red carpet after party, were reserved for a select group of personally invited guests.

The opulence of Georgian fashion has continued to inspire generations of designers. You can see this in garment silhouettes, textiles, detailing, and tailoring. Whether paying homage or subverting meanings the enduring fascination with the craftsmanship and bold design of Georgian court dress sees it continuously reinvented.

GARDEN ROOM: THE END AND THE FUTURE

The Georgian court and the modern red carpet both reflect and shape the changing cultural world.

Wide skirts defined women's court dress. Queen Charlotte insisted that they were worn at court for long after they ceased to be fashionable. After her death, her son George IV allowed the more popular, narrow styles to be worn. In 1824, rules were put into place setting out codes of dress. From then on, being well dressed was not enough to get you into court, you needed an invitation.

Today, the red carpet is similarly looking to the future. Initiatives such as Eco-Age's Green Carpet Challenge, established in 2010, have highlighted the importance of dressing sustainably. Many designers and celebrities now strive for a more ethical approach, using innovative eco-friendly fabrics, choosing vintage, upcycling, and re-wearing their favourite looks.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE AFTER VISITING CROWN TO COUTURE

We hope you enjoyed your visit to Crown to Couture. Below are some extension questions and activities to do with your group or independently.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What do you do to look like the most fabulous you?
- How would you make sure that you were noticed on the red carpet?
- If you had the centre stage, what message would you want to convey with your look? How would you do this through your ‘look’?
- The definition of celebrity is constantly changing. What does celebrity mean to you?
- What do you think the future holds for fashion?

THINGS TO DO

V&A Fashion collection: Room 40 – Free admission

Spanning five centuries, the [V&A Fashion Collection](#) is one of the largest and most comprehensive collection of dress in the world. Key items in the collection include rare 17th century gowns, 18th century ‘mantua’ dresses, 1930s eveningwear, 1960s daywear and post-war couture.

London Fashion Week

Keep an eye on the programme related to [London Fashion Week](#), which takes place twice a year. In February 2023, there were over 400 free experiences happening across the city.

London Fashion Week takes place 10-12 June and 15-19 September 2023.

Check out the shop fronts

Visit the shop fronts in Regent Street, Oxford Circus and Savile Row to see the fantastic artistic, fashion and tailoring displays in the windows.

Fashion and Textile Museum

Visit the [Fashion and Textile Museum](#) (£12.65 per ticket) in Bermondsey.

‘*The Fabric of Democracy*’ opens on 29 September 2023, which links to themes explored in in the Council Chamber in the King’s State Apartments.

‘*The Fabric of Democracy*’ explores printed propaganda textiles over more than two centuries. Discover how fabric designers and manufacturers have responded to political upheaval from the French Revolution through to Brexit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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