***Still The Hours***

**Transcript of audio-recorded pre-visit information**

**for Visually Impaired Audiences**

Hello, and thank you for your interest in *Still The Hours* at Hampton Court Palace. It is a sound-led, immersive tour going through the palace after dark. You will be led by a silent Guide along a pre-set route, rather than roaming free. This audio description is designed to give you a pre-visit impression of the kind of spaces you will walk through.

On arrival at the outer palace gates, called Trophy Gates, our staff will direct you to a **Welcome Space**, located to the right of the palace’s main entrance. You will pass a small gate near the palace moat our staff will show you through doors into a lobby. It has black and white marble flooring, a fireplace and sofas and chairs to sit on. This is where your group will assemble. Our stewards will set you up with headphones and give you some instructions before you enter the palace.

Your group will set off at a specific time. You will leave this building and walk towards the huge, heavy wooden **entrance gate.** They will be closed but a host will open the gate to let you in.

First, you will walk through **Base Court**, a large, square courtyard enclosed by palace buildings. The stone floor is uneven, with a mixture of cobbles and flagstones.

Passing through an imposing stone **Archway** beneath the Clock Tower, you are now near the heart of the Tudor palace. Here, the vaulted ceiling is decorated with royal initials and the Tudor rose.On your left, a staircase goes up to the Great Hall, but you will continue to follow your Guide who walks on into the next courtyard.

This is **Clock Court**, a large cobble-stoned courtyard flanked by palace buildings from different periods. The ornate stained-glass windows of the Tudor Great Hall are high up on your left, and the 17th century Baroque palace is on your right, marked by a line of round columns. Now turn around: towering above the archway, there is the original **Tudor clock** - one of the technical wonders of the 16th century.

The **Astronomical Clock** is built into the clock tower and has a diameter of over three metres. With its colourful layers of discs, golden hands and scientific looking decorations, it is an astonishing sight. Installed in 1540, this magnificent ‘time piece’ doesn’t just tell the hour, day and month. It also indicates the current moon phase, signs of the zodiac, the sun position, and essential daily travel information for the Tudor court: the time of high tide at London Bridge.

This is where your sound journey begins. There will be a few minutes of listening, before your guide begins to walk back through the Tudor archway. You turn right and right again into the old Tudor **cloisters.** Moonlight streams through the windows on your right. The long, dimly lit stone corridor runs past the Tudor kitchens, which are hidden behind the walls on your left.

The cloisters then turn right towards the **Chapel Royal**. You pass its wooden entrance door, framed by gilded crowns and colourful statues either side. Your Guide sets the pace, turning a corner again, leading you through double doors into a vast space with a grand, sweeping staircase on the right.

This is part of the Baroque Palace from the 17th century. The **Queen’s Staircase** leads towards the Queen’s State Apartments. Smooth steps of white marble are offset by a decorative wrought-iron banister. It leads up to a grand balcony overlooking painted walls and an impressively high ceiling decorated with glimmering, golden symbols of royalty. A large historic glass lantern hangs down from the middle of the ceiling.

You can hold on to the wooden banister on your left wall as you go up.

If you have booked an **access ticket** which provides supported lift use, your Access Guide will escort you along Fountain Court to the lift. You stay in the sound world. On the first floor, you will move through large Georgian state rooms with high ceilings, past chandeliers and paintings and a vast empty space which used to be a guard chamber, before you arrive on the balcony at the top of the sweeping Queen’s Staircase, rejoining your group.

It is here that you will hear the cries of a woman– please know that this is part of the sound world. If a real person was in distress we would give you clear signal.

The group now enters the **Haunted Gallery**, which is part of the older, Tudor palace. The walls of the space, which is over 30 metres long, are hung with green damask. A large, gold-framed group portrait is lit of the wall to your right. It was painted in 1545 and shows king Henry VIII surrounded by his family in a fictional assembly. He is flanked by his two daughters and by his third wife Jane Seymour, the mother of Edward, Henry’s only son, shown here as a young boy. Jane died after giving birth to him. This space is known to be ‘haunted’ because over time, people have reported ghostly presences. You will hear another Tudor queen in distress here, but don’t worry, there won’t be any jump scares on your tour.

You’ll feel a carpet underfoot. Feel free to walk straight down to the end and back along this narrow long room.

Next, your guide leads you back across the ornate balcony overlooking the Queen’s Staircase into the Georgian part of the palace. Tall double doors give entrance to an impressive, over 40 metres long space with a 4-metre-high ceiling, a **Gallery** built to connect the Queen’s and King’s state apartments. Here, as in much of the Baroque palace, the walls have dark brown wood panelling. Silken barriers protect historic furniture. Tall windows with deep windowsills run along the left side, while the right-hand wall is hung with paintings in golden frames, a series of portraits alongside smaller paintings of Greek mythology scenes.

The eleven larger portraits show young women in various poses, at three-quarter length. Some of them wear 17th century courtly fashion, lose, shimmering silk dresses, others are draped in simpler silk robes to evoke the timelessness of classical antiquity. They were ladies at the court of Charles II. This series is called ‘**The Windsor Beauties’.** It is noticeable that the faces of these women look strangely similar, with their sultry almond-shaped eyes, strong dark eyebrows, rosy cheeks and lush lips.

From here you will follow your Guide into the **Cartoon Gallery**, an even larger, taller space with an 8-metre-high ceiling, wood-panelled walls, and a continuing line of windows with deep windowsills on your left. The room will be very dark. Impressively large canvases cover the upper half of the right walls, showing biblical scenes – these are the famous 17th century copies of Raphael’s Cartoons.

A carpet runs the length of the Cartoon Gallery; please stay on the carpet wherever there is one. You can sit on the windowsills in this room for a few minutes while listening in.

Next, your Guide leads you into the **Queen’s Private Apartments**. Here, the rooms are much smaller, the ceiling is lower and there are many doorways to walk through. These were very private royal spaces. On the left of each room is a wall of shuttered windows. On the right, there are a series of private room set-ups behind barriers featuring game tables, bathroom objects, vases, dining set-ups, paintings and book cabinets. Dim light reflects in the chandeliers and golden candle holders on the walls.

The group will pause in the **Queen’s Bedroom,** in front of a magnificent four-poster bed which is nearly as tall as the room itself, draped in precious yellow damask. A large wall tapestry on the right shows a scene of ships and boats sailing on a blue sea.

Going past a private dining room and study, decorated and furnished for royal use, and walking through a couple of smaller service rooms, you arrive in the **Queen’s Oratory**. This room has the dark-brown wood-panelling underneath a white, octagonal vaulted ceiling, which rises to a lantern window at the top which lets in daylight. A historic bible lies on a wooden stand. The room has the atmosphere of a chapel; it was used for private prayer and devotion.

Now a door opens into the **Queen’s Public Apartments**, the Baroque state rooms where royal visitors and guests were greeted and entertained. As you turn more corners the sense of the palace as a labyrinth becomes stronger...

You enter the Public Dining Room, a dimly lit vast space with a high ceiling and sumptuously large paintings on the walls. The group will walk around a large dining room table. Strange white figures stand in this room - mannequins in abstract historic dress.

If you have booked an **access ticket** with lift use, your Access Guide takes you round into a white-panelled room to the side of the state route. It has gold-framed paintings on the wall and silken barriers on each side. You arrive on an impressive landing at the top of an ornate staircase, and here you turn left to the lift. You will rejoin the group in Fountain Court.

Upstairs, the group continues to walk through the Queen’s State Apartments, with the window wall on the left. All of the state rooms are in near darkness, only a few candles and candelabras light the way. Warm light reflects in crystal chandeliers and elegant mirrors, but details of the rooms are barely visible. You may vaguely perceive tapestries, fireplaces, vases, gaming tables and painted ceiling.

Turn right to out of a mysterious, dark, long gallery, you leave this wing by walking down a stone staircase, about 30 steps, into **Fountain Court.**

You may hear a large fountain, which is set into a round water pool in the grassy centre of the courtyard, surrounded by stone columns and vaulted cloisters on all sides. Through the columns there is a view of the sky. Feel the uneven historic flagstones underfoot.

Led by your Guide, you now turn a few corners and walk past a room laid out for chocolate making, into a room where furnishings are covered with dust sheets, then along a corridor into a domestic looking room. Green textile wallpaper covers the walls, indicating that this room was last inhabited in the mid-20th century. A small table is set up against a wall with a 1920s lamp, a radio, books including Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, and a copy of the Radio Times. There are benches for sitting along the walls.

From here, the Guide shows you the way through a couple more doorways into the **King’s Private Apartments** of the Baroque Palace. These private rooms are surprisingly small, next to the tall windows and window shutters on your left. Candle lights and chandeliers illuminate personal, intimate arrangements: small, gold framed paintings on the walls, two chairs here, a table there, and precious accessories on side tables.

Please take care here - some of the thresholds aren’t flush, and small steps between rooms are evened out with small ramps.

The private rooms now open out into a much larger, long space, the **Orangery**. It is more than 60 metres long and, in the darkness, we can’t see the end. Cool blue moonlight falls through the windows on your left, creating shards of light across the chequered marble floor. White marble statues are on the right, mythical figures on tall plinths.

Once you have moved through the Orangery you walk up a small ramp through a drawing room with bookcases into a small wood-panelled **Dining Room**. Here, spotlights illuminate a series of full-length portraits of young women, ladies in court dress. Commissioned by Queen Mary II as portraits of her friends, they were inspired by the Windsor Beauties and then called ‘The Hampton Court Beauties’

This is where your experience ends.

Keep your headphones on as your Guide leads you out, through Clock Court and Base Court, exiting the palace gates. If you need access to a step-free toilet after the experience, please tell your Guide who will show you to toilets in Base Court. We kindly ask any other guests to use the toilets in the Welcome Space where you started, to avoid clashes with incoming groups.

Before exiting the palace, please hand back the headphones. You will be given a booklet with more information on the women whose voices you’ve heard, and the research behind the project. We will make an audio-described version of the show booklet available on our website.

We want your experience of *Still The Hours* to be as accessible and inclusive as possible.

Please visit our Frequently Asked Questions section online, or contact us on 0333 320 6000 (from Monday - Friday, 09:00-14:00). Or you can email info@hrp.org.uk to discuss your individual needs.

We hope you will enjoy *Still The Hours* at Hampton Court Palace.

[End of audio description]