# Henry VIII’s State Apartments Audio Tour

# Hampton Court Palace

## Overview

Discover Henry VIII's State Apartments. Be guided by Joint Chief Curator Tracy Borman.

## Stop 1 Introduction

### Tracy Borman

My name’s Tracy Borman, and I’m the Joint Chief Curator at Historic Royal Palaces. Welcome to Hampton Court, which was the stage for the public dramas and private lives of Henry VIII, his six wives and the court beyond. In the rooms you are about to enter, courtiers plotted and spied to further their careers. Henry’s marriages were celebrated and mourned, and the future of the Tudor dynasty was secured.

To begin your tour, follow the signs to Henry’s State Apartments and enter from the staircase shown on your screen.

When you’re there, select the next stop to see a film about the six wives of Henry VIII

## Stop 2 The Great Hall

### Tracy Borman

Welcome to the Great Hall, the centrepiece of Henry VIII’s Palace. He built it in honour of Anne Boleyn in around 1532.

Well on a normal day the Great Hall would have served as effectively a staff canteen for the hundreds of courtiers who took their meals here. Some of them also slept on the floor of the Great Hall, but it really came into its own on special occasions as a stage set really for lavish entertainment staged by Henry and his queens.

You have to imagine what it must have been like; the music, the noise, the chatter, the smoke from the roaring fire, as all around you a scene of festivities was being played out. It would have been lit by candles and it would have illuminated the beautiful tapestries on either side of you, with their gold thread and vivid colours that can be quite hard to imagine today. In the later Tudor period William Shakespeare himself performed here in the Great Hall, so it’s been home to all sorts of drama.

The courtiers were fed here with food cooked in the palace’s vast kitchen complex. When you’re ready, go through the large door to the left of the King’s table to see the staircase that the food was brought up by. Or to find out more about this room and Henry’s most famous wife, select one of the options on your screen.

## Stop 2a Architectural history

### Tracy Borman

Here’s Daniel Jackson, Curator of Historic Buildings, to tell us why this hall is so special.

### Daniel Jackson

The Great Hall is one of the finest surviving examples of 16th century English architecture, and it’s also the last medieval style Great Hall built for an English monarch. This is Henry VIII making a political statement through his architecture. There’s a clear and powerful statement of his wealth, magnificence and majesty.

### Tracy Borman

And it would have been much more colourful then?

### Daniel Jackson

This room would have originally shone with colour. Almost every surface was highly decorated. The ceiling would have been painted with high contrast blues, reds, whites and greens and much of the detail picked out in gold. The tapestries themselves would have glistened and sparkled from the gold threads interwoven with the silk. The whole space was designed to inspire awe in any visitor.

While you’re looking at the ceiling, you might be able to spot one of the more interesting features which are the eavesdroppers. These are heads, supposedly representing courtiers, who are peering down at you in the hall from on high, reminding everyone in the court that they are always under observation and to watch what they are saying.

### Tracy Borman

When you’re ready, go through the large door to the left of the King’s table or stay here and select another option.

## Stop 2b Anne Boleyn

### Tracy Borman

Anne Boleyn is undoubtedly the most famous of the six wives, and she was Henry VIII’s great obsession. She first came to court in 1522 and although Henry didn’t notice her for four years, he made up for lost time. He could think of nothing else but setting aside his first wife and marrying this bewitching young woman with her French manners and style - she had spent a lot of time in France, she had great charisma, she was said to have had dark eyes that invited conversation. And she absolutely entranced Henry to the extent that people thought that she actually practiced witchcraft in order to seduce him.

But their romance didn’t last. Anne failed to give Henry a son and three years later she was executed at the Tower of London. Afterwards almost all traces of her were removed from Hampton Court. But on the panelled screen behind you, tucked away in one of the corners, you can still see a carved A and H intertwined. It was so small the builders missed it, so if you need help finding it ask one of our helpful State Apartment Warders to point it out to you.

## Stop 2c Tapestries

### Tracy Borman

Here’s curator, Matthew Storey.

### Matthew Storey

Originally brightly coloured and sparkly with gilded silver threads, the tapestries were bold pieces of up to date renaissance style art in Henry VIII’s medieval style Great Hall. They were only hung on special occasions, transforming the hall from a dining room for the Tudor court to a magnificent location for royal celebrations. Although hundreds of years of light have faded the colours, the story they tell is still clear…

The tapestries tell the story of Abraham, who is believed to be the patriarch, or father, of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith. Each tapestry shows a different episode in Abraham’s life, as told in the Old Testament of the bible, and focus on Abraham making a new covenant – or promise – with God and being given a long-awaited son.

Henry saw the birth of his son, Edward, as a sign of God’s approval for breaking away from the Pope and the Church of Rome. So, he wanted people to see these tapestries and think he was like Abraham, the father of a new dynasty and religion.

### Tracy Borman

Have a seat at one of the tables and enjoy the detail of these tapestries. When you’re ready, go through the large door to the left of the King’s table or stay here and select another option.

## Stop 3 Hall Place

### Tracy Borman

Go and stand next to the staircase underneath the windows.

The Hall Place would have been a space of hustle and bustle as every day, twice a day, servers bought food and wine from the kitchens up these stairs for courtiers and staff. It’s hard to imagine the sheer quantities of food that was eaten by the Tudor Court, but any food not eaten, and left over at the end of each meal, was collected here by the almoners and distributed amongst the local poor who gathered every evening at the Palace gates.

While staff dined in the Great Hall, the most expensive food was taken through the door to your left into the Great Watching Chamber. To find out why, go through the doors when you are ready and select the next track or stay here and choose the option on your screen to hear how the Tudor household operated.

## Stop 3a Serving the Tudor household

### Tracy Borman

Let’s hear from Daniel Jackson.

### Daniel Jackson

There were lots of rules controlling behaviour at court. These rule books or ordinances, as they were called, give us a great picture of what life was like for courtiers and staff at the palace. Often the rules are very specific, and if you read between the lines many are clearly trying to stop people behaving very badly at court.

The Eltham Ordinances created by Cardinal Wolsey for Henry VIII in 1526 include orders to stop servants stealing meat from the plates on their way to his table, to stop people leaving their dirty dishes lying about in the corridors outside their rooms, and it also forbids anyone bringing dogs into the palace, though the last rule does have an exception that allows ladies to carry a couple of small spaniels if they wish.

### Tracy Borman

When you are ready, go through the door to your left into the Great Watching Chamber and select the next track.

## Stop 4 Great Watching Chamber

### Tracy Borman

In this room the most important people at court gathered. It’s called the Great Watching Chamber, because courtiers and guards, and other visitors at court, would wait and watch here for the King to appear. You may notice the set of double doors in one corner; I would say it is the most important doorway in the entire palace because beyond that doorway lay Henry VIII’s private apartments. So, it separated his public world from his private one. 00:49… One of the most important events to happen in this room, took place in October 1537, when courtiers were waiting here to hear more about Queen Jane Seymour. She had recently given birth to his precious jewel, his son and heir, Edward… but she had sickened shortly afterwards. The court was in shock when news of Jane’s death was announced.

In the opposite corner is a door going into a small garderobe or toilet. This was a necessity when courtiers often waited in the Great Watching Chamber for hours and didn’t want to leave in case they missed the king. You can go there next. Or stay here and find out more about Jane Seymour or the Great Watching Chamber by picking an option from your screen.

## Stop 4a Architectural history

### Tracy Borman

Here’s Daniel Jackson to tell us more about the architecture of this room.

### Daniel Jackson

The Great Watching Chamber is another piece of statement architecture by Henry. Slightly smaller and more restrained than the Great Hall, it matches the luxurious decoration and design. The ceiling here is covered with royal symbols, including Tudor roses and the arms of both Henry and Jane Seymour – look for a phoenix rising above a castle and those are her arms. These are made from a mixture of fibres, brick dust and glue, all pressed into beautifully carved moulds. This technique allowed the workmen to create many copies of the same designs much more quickly than would have been possible carving them from wood.

### Tracy Borman

Workmen had to be creative because Henry VIII was very impatient and always wanted his work completed quickly.

Henry was a very demanding patron and expecting the highest quality architecture in the shortest possible time. Surviving building accounts from the time show carpenters being paid extra for candles to allow them to work through the night and finish constructing these beautiful spaces to the King’s tight deadlines.

When you’re ready, go into the small room just before the long corridor and select the next track.

## Stop 4b Jane Seymour

### Tracy Borman

Go find the portrait of Jane Seymour. It should be on an easel by the windows.

Jane Seymour seemed to be everything that Anne Boleyn was not. Whereas Anne had been very feisty and outspoken, Jane seemed mild mannered and placid, and I think therein lay her appeal for Henry VIII….

Beneath that placid exterior, there is evidence to suggest that Jane was every bit as ambitions as her predecessor, and she would succeed where Anne, and indeed Catherine of Aragon, had failed. She gave Henry the son that he so desired.

Sadly for Jane, though, she didn’t long enjoy her triumph, because just a few days after giving birth to Edward she contracted an infection and died here at Hampton Court.

When you’re ready, go into the small room just before the long corridor and select the next track.

## Stop 4c Tapestries

### Tracy Borman

Let’s hear from Matthew Storey

### Matthew Storey

Many of the tapestries in the Great Watching Chamber were originally in the collection of Cardinal Wolsey and, like Hampton Court Palace itself, became Henry VIII’s property after Wolsey’s fall from favour. Cardinal Wolsey owned 600 tapestries by 1520 and they were an expensive sign of his status.

Many of these tapestries are of the more expensive kind available at the time, as they were woven by highly skilled weavers in Northern Europe and contain pricy silk as well as woollen thread. Tapestries are practical, they insulate rooms in chilly palaces, but the pictures within in them can also be read like a picture book. Many of the stories show good, moral values like love, chastity or Christian virtue, triumphing over adversity or vice. Wolsey or Henry would have been glad of people looking at the tapestries, thought they were wealthy, powerful and living by upstanding moral values… even if the reality may have been different.

### Tracy Borman

When you’re ready, go into the small room just before the long corridor and select the next track.

## Stop 5 Garderobe

### Tracy Borman

Here’s Daniel Jackson, Curator of Historic Buildings.

### Daniel Jackson

We’re now in the Garderobe, a 16th century word for a toilet. The toilet itself would have been located where the fireplace currently is. The brickwork that you see at the back of the fireplace is actually the step up to the toilet seat. This room was likely used by courtiers and staff rather than the Royal Family. Henry made sure there were lots of toilets at Hampton Court Palace, as this was one way to show people how rich he was and how well he was looking after his guests.

### Tracy Borman

But this room did not remain a toilet for long. By the 1700s, etiquette changed and dining moved away from the Great Watching Chamber. Then, it was much more useful to have this as another Privy Chamber, and a little cupboard where you could do anything you wanted.

When you’re ready, lets re-join the court and follow in the footsteps of Henry VIII as he processes from the Great Watching Chamber to the Royal Pew in the Chapel Royal.

## Stop 6 Processional Gallery

You’re now walking through the Processional Gallery, following the footsteps of Henry VIII as he processed from his private apartments to the Chapel Royal, which lies just down this corridor. You have to imagine the corridor crowded with courtiers and servants, all hoping to catch the King’s eye.

This corridor has another name. It’s called the Haunted Gallery because it’s said that Henry’s fifth wife, Katherine Howard, came screaming along here, pleading for her life and on certain nights of the year, those screams can still be heard, or so the story goes.

While you’re here, why not take a look inside the room on your right, it was used by Henry’s servants. Or to hear more about Katherine Howard’s ghost, or the artwork along this corridor, select the option on your screen. If you are ready to move on, walk down the corridor and into the room on your left.

## Stop 6a Historic artwork

### Tracy Borman

Here’s curator, Matthew Storey.

### Matthew Storey

Look along the walls, left and right. The paintings in the Haunted Gallery show the art, people, fashions, and places of the Tudor world.

The 1500s were an exciting time for art, as the new ideas and styles of the Renaissance grew and spread throughout Europe.

Painting was more realistic than ever before and Tudor Britain looked to the artists of Europe, in particular Italy, Germany and the Netherlands to decorate their homes and palaces.

These innovations mean the Tudors are the first royal dynasty whose faces were recognisable to many people. Portraits were copied over and over to spread the likenesses of rulers to their subjects. For us today, this means we can come face to face with the Tudors and their royal court, see the clothes they wore and, through the symbols in the paintings, know how they wanted people to think and feel about them.

### Tracy Borman

Take a moment to stop and admire the paintings and the people in them. When you’re ready walk down the corridor and into the room on your left.

## Stop 6b Catherine Howard’s ghost

### Tracy Borman

Here’s David Packer, the State Apartment Warder, to tell us what happened after Henry married the teenaged Katherine Howard.

### David Packer

Katherine was not quite the virgin that she pretended to be. Everyone knew except the King. Imagine being one of his courtiers; you know that the King’s young bride is making a fool of him, you don’t want to be the one to tell him, but by God you don’t want to be the one who didn’t tell him when he finds out from somebody else. So, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer writes the King a note, leaves it in the Royal Pew here at Hampton Court Palace. The King does not believe it at first, but he is nothing if not paranoid. He orders an investigation and warns his wife’s accusers if she is not found guilty, you will be. Katherine’s entourage are told that they are out in the cold, out of a job, and their mistress will soon be out of a head. She was held under house arrest here, and the story goes that she got free. She managed to evade her guards and make her way to the Long Gallery leading to the Royal Pew where she believed Henry to be at prayer. She got to the very door of the Pew when she is taken by the guards and dragged screaming back to her own incarceration and her eventual date with the headsman’s axe. And it is that traumatic, harrowing scene, that her spirit is seen and heard to re-enact, her hair streaming behind her as she is dragged back to her doom.

Over the years, many people have had many different, strange and disturbing experiences here in this gallery. Some have heard screams; many have felt chills. If you stand quietly you may see what the building says to you.

### Tracy Borman

When you’re ready walk down the corridor and into the room on your left.

## Stop 7 Council Chamber

### Tracy Borman

Here in the Council Chamber, Henry VIII and his ministers would meet to discuss the most pressing issues of the day. Between 1540 and 1542, most of those issues concerned the King’s marriage dilemmas, and you can imagine the scene as the elderly courtiers were arguing and back-biting and flinging insults at each other. It was said that there was, quote, “great snarling here in the Council Chamber”.

Why not take a seat and imagine what it was like being one of Henry’s councillors? Listen in to their conversations – who would you side with? When you’re ready, go along the corridor towards the Royal Pew. Or to discover more about Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 7a Anne of Cleves & Katherine Howard

### Tracy Borman

Go to the fireplace and look at the two portraits hanging on the wall.

Henry VIII’s fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, is not the most famous but she is my own personal favourite, and the reason for that is that I believe she was by far the most sensible of Henry’s wives. Their marriage was the shortest of all six, because famously Henry could not stand the sight of Anne, although frankly, he was hardly an appealing prospect himself at the time of their marriage. Anne swiftly agreed to an annulment and was given a very generous settlement by the King, then welcomed at Court with the status of the King’s sister. So, she lived out her days very happily and very wealthily. It was even rumoured that Henry liked her so much that he would actually re-marry her. In fact, that didn’t happen. Wife number 5 was a rather different prospect. She was just a teenager when she married Henry. She was Katherine Howard, a very beautiful young woman with obvious appeal for the very ageing King. Katherine was very light-hearted, she loved to dance, she was great company for the King. Unfortunately, she was also quite ill-advised and entered into a serious of flirtations at Court. Katherine soon caught the appeal of other men at Court, which would have disastrous consequences.

When you’re ready, go along the corridor towards the Royal Pew.

## Stop 8 The Family of Henry VIII

### Tracy Borman

The paintings along this corridor represent the Tudor dynasty, including portraits of Henry VIII’s ancestors, his wives and his children. Before we go into the Royal Pew, find the painting The Family of Henry VIII. An image is on your screen. Here is curator Matthew Storey.

### Matthew Storey

This painting is not so much a portrait as an icon, designed to show Henry’s royal power and his dynasty. He sits beneath the cloth of state, an ancient symbol of authority, with his son and heir, Edward, next to him. At his side is Jane Seymour, the Queen who gave him this son, yet Jane had died shortly after Edward’s birth, so this is an impossible scene that exists outside time. The painting is not completely unrealistic, though. The gilded wood panelling, gold embroidered textiles, and the expensive carpet – a luxury imported from the Middle East – show us the rich decoration of Henry’s palace. Look to the left and right, beyond Henry’s daughters Mary and Elizabeth. You can see accurate views of a Tudor Palace garden. In the garden are two jesters, Jay Fool and Will Summers, who were real people who entertained the Tudor Court. Take a moment to look at the incredible details of the painting.

### Tracy Borman

If you’d like to hear more about Katherine Parr, Henry’s last wife, select the option on your screen. Otherwise walk on into the Royal Pew.

## Stop 8a Katherine Parr

### Tracy Borman

Katherine Parr was Henry’s sixth and final wife. She is often depicted as a nursemaid to the sick and ageing King, but that was very far from the truth. In fact, it was Katherine’s intellect that appealed to Henry most. She was an incredibly intelligent lady – she wrote books, she was quite a radical in matters of religion and could be quite outspoken but overall, she was a peacemaker and united Henry, not just with his son, but with his two forgotten daughters.

Have a look through the door on the left of The Family of Henry VIII painting to hear a re-creation of Henry and Katherine’s vows.

When you’re ready walk on into the Royal Pew.

## Stop 9 Royal Pews

### Tracy Borman

Henry VIII was deeply religious. It was here in the Royal Pews, that he prayed and knelt to God during services. The Royal Pews gave the King an elevated position closer to God and away from the prying eyes of his Council staff who sat down below. In 1537, Henry VIII watched his son, Prince Edward, christened in the chapel below from this pew where you are standing now. It was also here, a few years later, than Henry and his fifth wife, Katherine Howard, gave thanks for their marriage, and barely a year later that Henry learned of her infidelity.

Take a moment to look around you at this beautiful chapel, and in particular look up at the spectacular ceiling that is as it was in Henry’s day.

To discover more about this chapel and Henry VIII’s crown, select the option on your screen.

## Stop 9a Architectural history

### Tracy Borman

Here’s Daniel Jackson, Curator of Historic Buildings

### Daniel Jackson

If you look up now at the ceiling of the Chapel Royal, this is one of the best places in the palace to see Hampton Court as Henry would have seen it. Though much of the lower section of the chapel was redecorated for Queen Anne in 1700s, the ceiling has changed relatively little. The highly colourful decoration here gives you a real sense of what all the State Apartments would have looked like. The designs use a mix of religious and royal images. If you look carefully, alongside the angels and other religious symbols you see in many chapels, you will start to spot large numbers of crowns, orbs and sceptres, all royal images and, in fact, all items that Henry would have worn during his visits to this room, reminding visitors to the Chapel that this is the King’s space.

## Stop 9b Henry VIII’s crown

### Tracy Borman

The Tudor Imperial Crown was created for either Henry VIII or his father, Henry VII. The crown was used at the coronations of all Henry VIII’s children as they succeeded him, and possibly that of Henry VIII himself.

The crown was used by all Henry’s successors down to Charles I, who was painted with the crown on several occasions, before it was melted down by the Commonwealth government in 1649 at the Tower of London. You can see an image on your screen.

The replica crown is based on detailed research into inventories of Henry’s possessions, which tell us how it was constructed and how and where the stones were placed in it.

The crown jeweller, Harry Collins, and his master craftsman re-created this spectacular Tudor object for Historic Royal Palaces. The crown was hand-crafted in silver gilt with fine metal work detail and set with 346 specially selected jewels; a mix of pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, ensuring that it looks as spectacular and authentic as possible. Five tiny enamelled figures were also fashioned and set within each fleur-de-lis, representing the virgin and child, St George, and three kings. Why not take a moment to look at all the details of this crown, or ask one of our friendly volunteers for more information? When you are ready, go back into the Processional Gallery.

## Stop 10 The Tudor Dynasty

### Tracy Borman

You’ve now reached the end of Henry VIII’s State Apartments and the story of Henry’s life.

The magnificent rooms you’ve just visited are a lasting reminder of the splendour and wealth, the incredible collection of tapestries and paintings, and the high drama of the Tudor Court.

You are about to enter the Baroque Palace. To find out more about how large parts of the old Tudor Palace were demolished, select the option on your screen. To tour the Baroque Palace, select The Georgian Story tour in the main menu or to stay with the Tudors, why not go and find Henry VIII’s kitchens.

## Stop 10a Architectural history

### Tracy Borman

Let’s hear from Daniel Jackson.

### Daniel Jackson

You are now nearing the end of the 16th century state apartments here. Originally you would have been about to step into a more private area of Henry’s palace, perhaps eventually finding your way to his bedchamber or the Paradise Chamber, a room filled with amazing treasures. Instead, you will take a step almost 150 years forward in time to 1692 as you enter the Queen’s staircase. When William and Mary took the throne in 1689, they commissioned Christopher Wren to design them a brand-new palace here at Hampton Court. Wren’s original plan was to demolish everything except the Great Hall. Thankfully his plan was judged far too expensive and eventually only around a third of the Tudor palace was destroyed. It wasn’t all bad news though, as in its place Wren created one of his finest buildings: a grand new set of royal apartments in an exciting new baroque architectural style.

### Tracy Borman

To begin your tour of the Baroque Palace, select The Georgian Story from the main menu.

## [End of Tour]