



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

HAMPTON COURT PALACE

LGBT + PALACE PRIDE STORIES



A COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

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

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INTRODUCTION

LGBT+ histories can be found in the stories of all our palaces. However, same sex love and desire and non-binary gender identities have been understood in different ways throughout history. Our modern understanding of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans identities are very recent, dating from the late 19th Century and continuing to develop up to the present day.

When we try to look for these identities in the past we struggle, but if we look for love, desire, and the way people presented themselves, we find a rich history everywhere. People in the past saw sexuality as something you did, rather than something you were. Stories abound of people dressing and living their lives in ways that crossed the gender boundary of male and female. We sometimes use a '+' as part of 'LGBT+' or the word 'queer' to represent the many ways people lived their lives.

This resource guide will explore the LGBT+ stories at Hampton Court Palace. These histories are neither new nor an addition to Historic Royal Palaces. Queer history is at risk of being forgotten or misrepresented. Yet the search for 'evidence' of LGBT+ or Queer life is often challenging – meaning it can be coded, obscured, or deliberately protected for their security.

History is not locked in the past. History continually evolves as it responds to people with lived experience, new research and society's shifting perspectives. Historic Royal Palaces is committed to telling and sharing history in this way, making history come to life as we work closely with our communities to broaden perspectives and make meaningful and relevant connections with our palaces and their stories.

Thank you **London Friend** and **Sarbat Sikhs**, our community partners, and Jon Sleight, who helped shape this resource.

USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource aims to support individuals and groups to better connect with lesser-known histories of Hampton Court Palace. We selected stories that have a physical presence at the palace: architecture and artwork. This does not mean these are the only LGBT+ stories at the palace, but it is a starting point.

We have included the following to help you explore these stories and help set the wider context for these stories:

- map where you can find these physical spaces in and around the palace;
- LGBT+ history timeline (British);
- glossary of terms;
- conversation starters for group discussions; and
- references to help you find out more.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

LGBT+ means lesbian, gay, bi, trans and any other gender identity or sexual orientation that isn't on the list.

Gender Identity is whether you are a man, woman or neither. It might be different from the gender you were given when you were born.

Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 1980s by the queer community who have embraced it.

Sexual orientation is who you are attracted to.

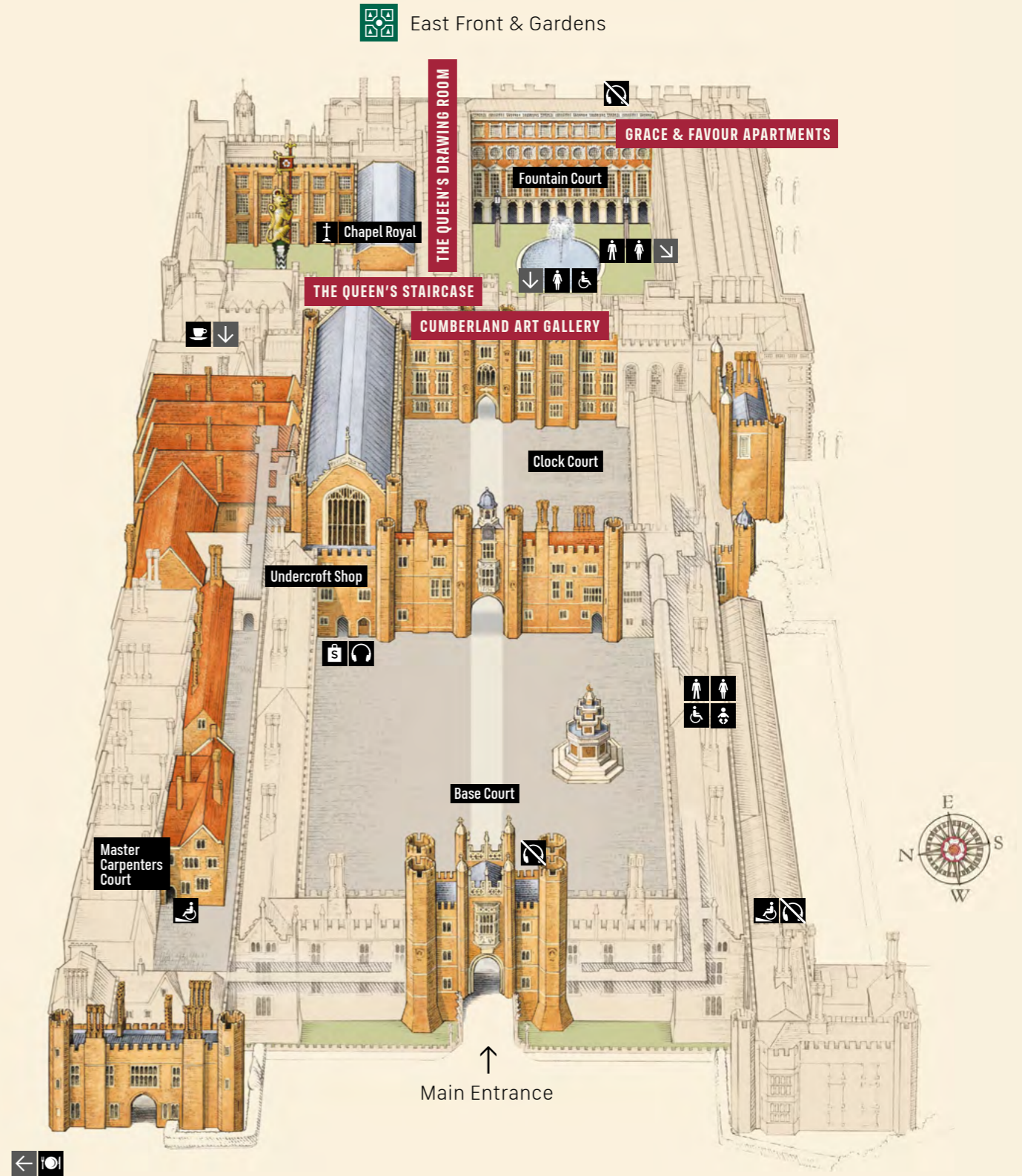
TIMELINE OF LGBT+ RIGHTS IN THE BRITAIN

- 1533** The **Buggery Act** outlawed all homosexual relations in Britain and later within the British Empire. Those convicted under the act were subjected to the death penalty.
- 1861** The **Offences Against the Person Act** abolished the death penalty for homosexual acts. Instead, a minimum of ten years in prison was to be given to anyone convicted.
- 1885** The **Criminal Law Act** illegalised any type of homosexual act whether it was in private or public; witnesses were not needed for a prosecution.
- 1889** German psychiatrist **Albert von Schrenck-Notzing** claimed to have successfully used conversion therapy on a homosexual patient. False claims were made about a 'cure' to non-heteronormativity as homosexuality was wrongly diagnosed as a mental disorder. At the time 'treatments' such as electric shock therapy had been used.
- 1952** **Alan Turing** was prosecuted as a homosexual under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. He was forced to undergo chemical castration. Two years later he died by suicide.
- 1957** The **Wolfenden Report** was published and argued that there was no scientific evidence to class homosexuality as a disease. It also suggested that the law should not invade citizens' private affairs.
- 1966** The **Beaumont Society** was established. It aimed to educate the public and provide help and support to the transgender community.
- 1967** The **Sexual Offences Act** partially decriminalised male homosexuality. It was allowed between consenting adults over the age of 21 strictly in private.
- 1970** The **Gay Liberation Front** was founded in the wake of the **Stonewall Riots** which took place the year before in New York.
- 1972** The first UK Gay **Pride** rally was held in London.
- 1982** The first **HIV/AIDS case** was reported in the UK. The **AIDS epidemic** grew from this point.
- 1988** The **Government Act** under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government enacted Section 28 which prohibited the distribution of materials and literature that promoted homosexuality.
- 1996** **Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART)** became the standard treatment for HIV. It restored the immune system and stopped the development of AIDS, significantly reducing the death toll by 80% between 1995-2000.
- 2004** The **Civil Partnership Act** allowed same-sex couples to enter into secular civil partnerships. The same year the **Gender Recognition Act** enabled transgender people legal recognition by allowing them to acquire a birth certificate in which they could choose to be assigned as 'male' or 'female'.
- 2010** The **Equality Act** legally protected the LGBT community from discrimination in employment.
- 2013** The **Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act** legalised marriage for same-sex couples in England and Wales.
- 2014** Scotland legalises same-sex marriage
- 2018** The UK Government committed itself to placing a legal ban on **conversion therapy** as part of its **LGBT equality plan**.
- 2020** Same-sex marriage was legalised Northern Ireland.
- 2022** In April, the UK government went against its plans to legally ban conversion therapy and excluded the trans community from the proposed ban. **At present, the UK still has not put in place a legal ban on conversion therapy.**

PALACE PRIDE STORIES

These stories are shared in chronological order. Use this map to find the physical traces of these histories in Hampton Court Palace.

- The Queen's Staircase - *James I & George Villiers*
- Cumberland Art Gallery - *Frances Stewart & the Windsor Beauties*
- The Queen's Drawing Room - *Queen Anne*
- Grace & Favour Apartments - *Catherine Duleep Singh*



MAP KEY

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Audio Guide | Privy Kitchen Café | Accessible toilet | Male toilet |
| Audio Guide dropbox | Tiltyard Café | Baby change | Level access route |
| Shop | Chapel Royal | Female toilet | |

Please note there are uneven surfaces around the palace. For all access needs including lifts please speak to one of our Palace Hosts.

THE REIGN OF QUEEN JAMES: KING JAMES I AND VI



James' father was murdered when he was very young. With the absence of a father figure in his youth, James was often surrounded by men who, in an attempt to boost their influence, flattered him at every opportunity. James loved men throughout his life. James was 13 when he met his first favourite, Esmé Stewart, who was 37. Stewart became a mentor to the young king.

King James was so open about his same-sex love affairs that the phrase "Elizabeth was King: now James is Queen" was often heard in the streets of London. At James' court it soon became apparent that the King preferred the company of men and

boys and quickly gave them lands and titles. So common was the knowledge that powerful families would send their sons to court to gain favour with the King rather than their daughters.

When James was older, he formed relationships with handsome younger men whom he could mentor. In 1614 James met George Villiers. Villiers was described as being exceptionally handsome, often regarded as the most handsome man in Europe. James nicknamed Villiers 'Steenie' which was apparently derived from the biblical description of St Stephen who had "the face of an angel".

Bishop Godfrey Goodman described Villiers as 'the handsomest bodied man of England...and so sweet of disposition'. In 1615, James knighted Villiers and two years later he became the first commoner in more than a century to be elevated to a dukedom. People at the time, and many since, have believed that James and Villiers' relationship was physical, and that Villiers achieved his position as royal favourite thanks to his sexual relationship with the King.



James and Villiers exchanged intimate letters, many of which still survive to this day. James wrote in a letter to Villiers:

"There is this difference betwixt that noble hand and heart, one may surfeit by the one, but not the other, and sooner by yours than his own; therefore give me leave to stop, with mine, that hand which hath been too ready to execute the motions and affections of that kind of obliging heart to me".

James often referred to Villiers as his spouse, declaring that "I desire only to live in this world for your sake...". Until James' death, Villiers was his closest companion and constant advisor and used his position to enrich his relatives and advance their social positions, which greatly soured public opinions towards him. James declined in health in the latter years of his life eventually dying of dysentery in March 1625 with Villiers by his side. Villiers was eventually assassinated in the reign of Charles I due to his unpopularity.

A painting that depicts George Villiers can be found in The Queen's Staircase: Gerrit van Honthorst's *Apollo and Diana* of 1628. The mythological title hides the painting's true meaning because this painting is really about the politics of the Stuart court. Apollo is actually King Charles I, and Diana, Queen Henrietta Maria, and in the centre, dressed as the god Mercury, is George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham.

This painting tells us a lot about Villiers' power. Aged 35 when it was painted, Villiers had maintained his position at court in the reign of James' successor, Charles I. He assumed the role of the loyal older brother to the younger king.

The action of the painting revolves around the Duke as he leads figures representing the subjects studied by an educated gentleman, such as Grammar, Astronomy and Arithmetic, out of the darkness at the right. Meanwhile, the tormented figures and the goat, representing vices such as envy and lust, are driven out at the bottom left. Villiers is rewarded for his efforts to promote good over evil by being strewn with heavenly roses. However, we should never think that the favourite wields his own power as that would be getting above his station. He wields the power given to him by the King, and Charles reaches down from his lofty throne in the clouds to the loyal Villiers.

Power, especially when given for favour rather than merit, breeds discontent. In the year this painting was made, Villiers was assassinated, stabbed in the chest, which is exposed so enticingly by the artist. His killer was a sailor, disgruntled by Villiers' poor performance as Lord High Admiral.



WHO'S THAT MAN? FRANCES STUART IN THE COURT OF CHARLES II



The court of Charles II knew how to bring the drama and true intrigue lay with the women in this exclusive world.

Ten women from the court of Charles II are now forever immortalised in portraits, known as the Windsor Beauties. These portraits line the Communication Gallery at Hampton Court Palace. It has been wrongly assumed for centuries that the Beauties all had romantic relationships with the King. One of the most interesting relationships was between two of the Beauties themselves: Frances Stuart and Barbara Villiers.

Frances Stuart arrived in the English court in February 1662 with a letter of introduction from exiled Queen Henrietta Maria, describing her as the prettiest girl in the world. She took to court life, but her naivety stood out in the salacious world of Charles II. Frances was a child, around 15 years old, and this put her in a precarious position, in need of security and court survival skills. Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine, could offer her both.

When Frances arrived at court, Barbara swiftly took her under her wing and soon became her favourite. It was often noted that the two also shared a bed. In the 17th century, bedsharing was a common practice among women in the court. While it existed in part to protect female virtue from men's advances, it also allowed a culture of same-sex sexual expression between female bedsharers. For Barbara to invite Frances to share her bed would have meant a strong emotional bond, and the potential for a sexual one.

In February 1663, Samuel Pepys wrote of gossip at court:

"Another story was how my Lady Castlemaine, a few days since, had Mrs. Stuart to an entertainment, and at night began a frolique that they two must be married, and married they were, with ring and all other ceremonies of church service, and ribbands and a sack posset in bed [. . .]"

It is interesting that in this 'entertainment' of marriage, the two women use 'ring and all other ceremonies of church service.' Though Charles' court was famous for lewdness, the use of religious symbolism in the 'frolique' implies there may have been deeper meaning. Even if the point of the joke had been to simply get the two women in bed together for sexual performance, there would have been no need for 'ceremonies of church service.'

Even if the marriage never occurred and it was just a rumour, having two distinct contemporary sources discussing it means that people at the time believed it did. The story was reported matter-of-factly or even humorously, rather than with shock or disapproval. This shows that same-sex relationships were talked about and understood in the royal court.

A painting by Jacob Huysmans depicts Frances 'in a buff doublet like a soldier'. This might have signified Frances' newfound power at court, or have been a bold fashion statement. It also recalls the taking on of different gender roles seen when Barbara took the role of the bridegroom in the marriage 'frolique'. Without Frances' own words to describe why she appeared in this outfit, we need to look at the wider culture of the 17th Century to understand what it meant.



Women's cross-dressing in the period was associated with ideas of strength and resourcefulness, so Frances may have been trying to communicate similar ideas with her portrait. When women wore men's clothes at this time they could sometimes take on the roles and privileges men had, including having relationships with other women.

While Frances had a reputation for having a sexual relationship, and even a marriage, with another woman, she was famed for her virginity and steadfastness against the King's desire; she never officially became his mistress. Frances' sexual experiences may have contributed to her choice to be fashioned in ways that subverted expectations of her.

THE FAVOURITES: QUEEN ANNE



Queen Anne (r 1702-14) met her close friend and confidante, Sarah Churchill, in childhood. Sarah was self-confident, with blue eyes and flaxen hair, but she had a temper. Anne insisted they drop their noble titles in their letters and call each other Mrs Freeman and Mrs Morley, so their relationship would be that of two equal women.

Anne certainly loved Sarah. She gave her the powerful positions of Mistress of the Robes, Groom of the Stole, Keeper of the Privy Purse, and Ranger of Windsor Park when she became Queen in 1702.

Anne in a letter to Sarah: *“If I could tell how to hinder myself from writing to you every day I would...but really I cannot... when I am from you I cannot be at ease without enquiring after you.”*

Sarah’s arrogance contributed to her downfall as Queen Anne grew close to Sarah’s cousin Abigail Masham. Abigail had the gentle character that the emotionally vulnerable Anne needed. A wife and mother, Queen Anne suffered from poor health, and many of her pregnancies ended in miscarriage or stillbirth.

We will never know what Queen Anne’s private relationships with Sarah and Abigail were, but in 1708 Sarah betrayed Anne’s trust. Sarah’s secretary Arthur Mainwaring circulated political pamphlets against the Queen, talking of the ‘sweet service’ and ‘dark deeds at night’ between Anne and Abigail.

Anne and Sarah had a terrible, final argument in the Queen’s Apartments at Kensington Palace in 1710 after which they never spoke again.

The 2018 film, *The Favourite*, depicts the relationship between Queen Anne and Sarah Churchill. Hampton Court Palace was proud to welcome the film’s cast and crew during the spring of 2017.

Key filming locations included Henry VIII’s Kitchens, the Cartoon Gallery and Fountain Court, which are all open to the public.

You can see a portrait of Queen Anne in the ceiling in the Queen’s Drawing Room.

LIFELONG COMPANIONS: PRINCESS CATHERINE AND LINA SCHÄFER

Catherine and her sisters, Sophia and Bamba, were granted Grace and Favour accommodation in Faraday House, Hampton Court Palace by their Godmother, Queen Victoria. Their father, Maharaja Duleep Singh (1838-93), was deposed by the East India Company as the ruler of the Punjab in 1849 and taken to England in 1854, whereupon Queen Victoria grew quite fond of him. This moment of British aggression in India also marks the Royal Family's acquisition of the Koh-I-Noor diamond among other riches taken from the Maharaja's court. Maharaja Duleep Singh would become a naturalised British citizen, and all of his children were born in the United Kingdom.

Catherine, like her sisters, was proud of her heritage and visited Punjab many times during her life. She was an ardent suffragette—she would continue to attend the annual dinners and other suffragette events even after women had won the right to vote. While her father was away organising an ill-fated attempt to regain control of his throne and wrest India from British rule, Catherine and her siblings were placed in the care of Arthur Oliphant.

It is was under Oliphant's care, at the age of 15, she met Lina Schäfer, a German governess who would become her lifelong companion. While there is no explicit reference to a sexual relationship between the two women, their relationship is often described as 'intimate'. Catherine lived with Schäfer in Kassel, in a mansion Schäfer acquired in 1908. Catherine would stay with her partner through the first World War, a risky move. There is little indication that Catherine's family ever raised any issue with this arrangement.

After Schäfer's death in 1937, Catherine returned to England—growing weary of the Nazi presence in Kassel. Catherine was said to be deeply upset by her death. In her will, she requested that a quarter of her ashes be 'buried as near as possible to the coffin of my friend Fraulein Lina Schäfer.'

During her later years in England, staying in Coalhatch House in Penn, Buckinghamshire, she took in a series of German-Jewish refugees until her death in 1942. She was cremated in Golders Green crematorium. Only her sister Sophia could attend; Bamba was already in Lahore and was not able to return because of the Second World War. Sophia and Bamba had Catherine's home renamed in her honour—Hilden Hall, after her middle name Hilda.

In 1997, a dormant Swiss bank account and deposit box was identified in her name, a joint account with Schäfer. After much popular media speculation, the account was given to the descendants of her sister Bamba's heir. None of the Duleep Singhs' children had children themselves, including the sisters' brothers.

Bamba passed away in 1957, the last heir to the Sikh empire.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

In this section you can find suggestions and ideas for starting conversations within your group.

KING JAMES I/VI

King James was head of both the church and state. Is that why he could explore what we would understand to be a queer life when it was illegal to do so? How do you feel about that contradiction?

Historians previously used the term 'favourite' to describe men King James was intimately with or expressed feelings and desire for. What word would you use to describe these men?

Queer people made and changed history – how does that make you feel?

FRANCES STEWART

How often do we presume gender binary in the portraits around us? Are they always just male or female to you?

In a time when women had limited legal and social rights, why do you think Frances deliberately explored gender expression as both male and female in art?

What does 'handsome' and 'beautiful' mean to you?

QUEEN ANNE

The term 'favourite' refers to the close companions of leaders and those in power. Their confidante and closest friend, the term is also used instead of 'lover' or 'mistress' in some cases. Queen Anne's relationship with her favourite, Sarah Churchill, has been noted as being very tumultuous.

Friendships as well as romantic relationships can be toxic. How do you think this affected Queen Anne?

CATHERINE DULEEP SINGH

Catherine took a stand and advocated for causes she believed in such as the right for women to vote. She was an active member of the Women's Right movement and became a Suffragist as a member of the Fawcett Women's Suffrage Group and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society. The LGBTQ+ community is always at an intersection with other stories of social justice, they are never just one story or struggle. How do you reflect on this?

How does Catherine's story make you feel?

FURTHER RESOURCES

You can explore further links and resources on LGBTQ+ stories and histories within our spaces and beyond.

Website

[Frances Stuart and Barbara Villiers | Historic Royal Palaces \(hrp.org.uk\)](https://hrp.org.uk/frances-stuart-and-barbara-villiers)

[LGBT+ Royal Histories | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces \(hrp.org.uk\)](https://hrp.org.uk/lgbt-royal-histories-tower-of-london)

[Palace Pride | Historic Royal Palaces \(hrp.org.uk\)](https://hrp.org.uk/palace-pride)

Podcasts

How we used to talk about LGBTQ+

[Historic Royal Palaces Podcast: How we used to talk about LGBTQ+ on Apple Podcasts](https://hrp.org.uk/podcast/how-we-used-to-talk-about-lgbtq-on-apple-podcasts)

A Thousand Years of Kings, Queens and In-betweens (this is a replay of a Crowdcast which has already taken place)

[A Thousand Years of Kings, Queens and In-betweens - Crowdcast](https://hrp.org.uk/crowdcast/a-thousand-years-of-kings-queens-and-in-betweens)

Blogs

[A queer walk through Hampton Court Palace - HRP Blogs](https://hrp.org.uk/blog/a-queer-walk-through-hampton-court-palace)

[Walter Hungerford and the Buggery Act: LGBTQ+ History and Punishment at The Tower of London - HRP Blogs](https://hrp.org.uk/blog/walter-hungerford-and-the-buggery-act-lgbtq-history-and-punishment-at-the-tower-of-london)

Watch

[Exploring queer history with Rowan Ellis and Matthew Storey - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Historic Royal Palaces' Community Partnerships Team is happy to offer additional support and advice to prepare for visits to all our palaces.

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

IMAGE CREDITS

King James I of England and VI of Scotland, © National Portrait Gallery, London

Gerrit van Honthorst's Apollo and Diana of 1628, Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023

The King's Staircase, © Historic Royal Palaces

Frances Stewart, later Duchess of Richmond, Image: Royal Collection Trust/© His Majesty King Charles III 2017

Frances Stuart, Duchess of Richmond (1647-1702) before 1662, Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023

