# The Tudor World in the Wolsey Rooms (Website Version) Audio Described Tour

# Hampton Court Palace

## Overview

Discover the story of Henry VIII and the world of the 1500s, told through surviving paintings from the Royal Collection.

## Stop 1 Introduction

### Narrator

Welcome to The Tudor World, an audio guide that brings the world of the 16th century to life, through the paintings and historic objects on display in the Wolsey Rooms**.**

The tour has 11 stops. After an introduction in Clock Court, you will move through to the four Wolsey rooms where you will be introduced to 8 artworks. Each stop begins with a visual description of the artwork, followed by some more details about the story behind it. Directions to the following artwork are given in a short track between each stop. Across the tour, you’ll be joined by various experts about life in Tudor England - like Brett here.

### Brett Dolman

Hello, my name is Brett Dolman. I am Curator, Collections for Historic Royal Palaces. We are going to take you on a journey back to the sixteenth century, where we're going to meet Thomas Wolsey, the owner of Hampton Court Palace, back in the 1520s.

Wolsey's a great guide for introducing the 1500s, the world of Henry VIII and the Tudor dynasty. But this is more than a story about kings and queens and rich politicians like Wolsey. This is also a story about the ordinary men and women who lived and worked here at Hampton Court, and enabled the Tudor court to exist and to flourish.

I hope that the Wolsey rooms gives you a sense of what the whole world looked like across the whole of the 1500s including but going beyond Wolsey’s brief period in charge, how England in particular changed over the century, between Henry VIII’s succession in 1509 and the death of his daughter, Elizabeth the 1st in 1603.

### Narrator

Our first stop is in Clock Court. You can reach this by making your way through the main entrance, walking right through the first courtyard (Base Court). There’s a second archway directly opposite. Go through that, and you’re in Clock Court.

## Stop 2 Clock Court & The Wolsey Rooms

### Narrator

Clock Court is a large courtyard space surrounded by red brick buildings with large windows, turrets and chimneys. It’s the heart of the oldest part of the palace.

There is a large clock tower over the archway of the entrance you have just entered through. It has a black astronomical clock face, with the 12 zodiac signs in gold, and is flanked by two turrets.

Below the clock there is a coat of arms, belonging to Thomas Wolsey - a key figure on this tour. It shows his crest held up by two angels. Either side of the crest there are terracotta busts of Roman emperors.

Glenn Richardson, Professor of Early Modern History at St. Mary's University in Twickenham, tells us more about the connection Wolsey forged with the king, Henry VIII.

### Glenn Richardson

Henry wanted to make a name for himself, and Wolsey saw that in supporting Henry - against the advice sometimes of his many counsellors - he might make a way for himself in Henry's favour. For over twenty years, Henry VIII and Wolsey worked together, consulting each other, sharing an intelligence, and a mutual admiration, of each other's talents.

### Narrator

With the archway you came through behind you, to the right of the courtyard there’s a row of 14 white columns, contrasting the rest of the red courtyard buildings. These are a 17th century addition to the palace, which partially hide Thomas Wolsey's original private apartments. Karey Draper is Curator of Historic Buildings for Historic Royal Palaces.

### Karey Draper

The Wolsey rooms as they are known were created to be a warm and comfortable retreat, as well as a place to conduct business.

They are exceptionally significant as part of the oldest part of the palace and one of my favourite places to visit. One can almost imagine Wolsey still here, walking these very rooms, looking out over the gardens towards the River Thames whilst carrying out the King's business.

### Narrator

We’re now going to head to the Wolsey Rooms. You can pause these instructions at any point if you need more time.

Behind the row of white columns, there are three doors. Head towards the columns, around 20 metres away. Once you're there, go through the columns and make your way to the furthest door to your left along the back wall.

Go through this door, down a ramp and turn immediately right. Follow the brick wall on your right all the way down until you come to an open door in a low archway. Do mind your head here! There is a step up into the turret. Go through the doorway, and ahead of you is a spiral staircase. When you’re ready, make your way up this staircase. It has twenty steps and curves round to the right. A banister runs the length of the left-hand wall.

At the top of the staircase, open the door in front of you, by pulling the handle towards you. Take care here, as there is a second door which might be sticking out in this small space to your left. Move a couple of steps forward, and go through this open door on the left.

The first artwork is immediately to your left, behind a low wooden barrier.

## Stop 3 Portrait of an Unknown Woman

### Narrator

You are now in the Wolsey rooms. The first room is a large grand space. It has dark wooden panelling from the floor to ceiling and is lit by the natural light entering through the tall, rectangular windows. The white ceiling is divided by carved wooden ribs, painted in blue and gold with Wolsey’s heraldry, all arranged into an intricate pattern that looks like a spiders web. In front of each artwork there is a wooden interpretation panel that protrudes by about a metre. The space in the centre of each room is clear.

The part of the tour has 11 stops across 8 artworks. Each stop begins with a visual description of the artwork, followed by some more details about the story behind it. We’ve selected certain artworks to focus on, but there are often others on the nearby walls, as well as some glass display cases. We’ll hear from more experts, like Brett here.

### Brett Dolman

Welcome to Thomas Wolsey's Grand Reception Room. This is where the Cardinal received his guests, perhaps the French ambassador or an envoy from the Pope. This is a place where the Tudors met the rest of the world.

### Narrator

This is a portrait of an unknown woman painted in the late 16th century.

It is a large painting, around 2 metres tall by 1 metre wide. It shows a standing woman, with a sad look on her face, who fills the whole canvas. She has pale, white skin; dark eyes; rosy cheeks and pink pursed lips. She is dressed in a very pale pink, floor length robe embroidered with colourful flowers, fruits and birds. She is wearing an elaborate, tall, narrow hat in a similar shade to her dress. It has a long golden veil that reaches from the hats’ apex and flows down her back. A ring is suspended from her neck on a black thread and she wears another ring on her right thumb and pearls around her right wrist. She is standing in a woodland area, with a dark, leafy tree behind her. She rests her right hand on the bowed head of a stag that stands beside her. In the bottom right corner there is a large gold painted label. It is inscribed with a poem in faded cursive text, which introduces a theme of melancholy.

### Eleri Lynn

My name is Eleri Lynn and I'm a Tudor fashion historian and curator.

### Narrator

Paintings like this portrait show that the English court was keenly aware of international styles and fashions. Her clothing is not typical of English dress at all, but is Ottoman or Persian, with a loose gown, high headdress and jewelled shoes.

### Eleri Lynn

The Tudors loved to wear imported fabrics like silk and velvet from Italy, furs from Russia, lace and linen from France and the Low Countries, and even silks from as far afield as Eastern Asia. Their palaces and manors were decorated with carpets from Anatolia and Egypt, tapestries from the Netherlands, and hangings and furniture embellished with a type of design called arabesque, inspired by Muslim geometric patterns from Moorish Spain and North Africa.

### Narrator

These fashions caught on and weren’t restricted just to the upper classes. Floral patterns in particular were copied and became widespread. Mishka Sinha, Curator for Inclusive History at Historic Royal Palaces explains.

### Mishka Sinha

We know that this is a taste that’s quite popular … Its floral motifs are very much desired, even amongst ordinary people, and this taste grows as Britain continues to acquire more and more materials that are able to feed these tastes.

### Narrator

But sometimes demand outstripped supply so merchants resorted to other means to make money.

### Mishka Sinha

There are accounts of piracy, basically, by English pirates who go and plunder Portuguese ships, kill people, and take the goods. And there are detailed descriptions of these incredibly valuable goods, some of which end up with Queen Elizabeth I herself.

### Narrator

To get to the next artwork, turn right and walk around 10 paces to the end of the room.

## Stop 4 Battle of the Spurs

### Narrator

This large artwork is a landscape oil painting in a carved blue and gold frame around 1 and a half metres tall by 2 and a half metres wide. It shows a gruesome battle scene in the foreground. An entanglement of soldiers on foot and on horseback rush at one another. The knights wear black and silver armour. Their black and brown horses are covered in intricately patterned saddle cloths, with red and gold reins.

This painting depicts the Battle of the Spurs, a crucial battle in the early years of Henry's reign. And this painting tells us everything about the kind of king that Henry wanted to be.

On the left hand side of the painting, an English St George’s cross flag waves in the air, and a group of English trumpeters raise their instruments to encourage the troops On the right there is a French flag with a red cross on white fabric. In the background is a vibrant green, hilly landscape with the town of Thérouanne in the distance. In front of the town, by a ruined building, is the English military camp: the cross of St George is painted on some of the tents and some of the others bear the Tudor colours of white and green. There is a castle on the right and some more tents.

### Brett Dolman

Henry VIII saw himself as a kind of mediaeval knight, destined to lead his country to greater glory on the battlefield. Centre stage in this painting is Henry VIII himself. He's shown taking the surrender of one of the leading French knights. Even though the king, in reality, wasn't allowed to take the risk of being involved in the battle.

### Narrator

So why was Henry so determined to lead, or certainly to be seen to lead, his armies into battle against France?

### Brett Dolman

England's traditional enemy was France. English kings were descended from Norman invaders from France who'd once controlled both countries, so English kings often attempted to assert their ancient rights over French lands by sending an army across the Channel.

### Narrator

But this painting is not only a triumphant display of heroism and glory.

In the foreground several soldiers are depicted dying or lying dead in battle, particularly at the bottom of the painting, indicating the awful reality of war.

### Brett Dolman

This is not a painting which shirks the awful reality of war. In the foreground are severed limbs and images of the dead and the dying. People looking at this painting may have known people that had died on this battlefield, and would certainly have been aware of the grim fate that awaited Thérouanne. It was burnt to the ground.

### Narrator

These are the words of Ellis Griffith, a career soldier from the 1510s until the 1550s, describing what life was like for an ordinary Tudor soldier.

At this time, the grey bearded winter began to show his face through the cold black frost wind, in short days and long nights. Which made the weakling soldiers, weak with colds, complain and groan one to another. Some said it was not necessary for them to be lying there on the ground in the shelter of banks and hedges, dying of cold.

Griffith was one of the survivors. Thousands of nameless others died in battle, or from infected wounds, or from disease.

Before you move on, you might like to feel the tactile piece of material attached to the wooden panel in front the painting. It’s a piece of the kind of material ordinary foot soldiers wore in the early 1500s – not very protective on the battlefield!

There is an open doorway to the left of this painting, beside the end of the wooden interpretation panel. To get to the next artwork, walk 5 paces to the doorway. As you enter the next room, turn right and walk another 5 paces, around the corner of the next wooden interpretation barrier.

The painting of Henry VIII is in the centre of the wall to your right.

## Stop 5 Henry VIII

### Narrator

This is a portrait of Henry VIII in a rectangular framed canvas measuring about half a metre each way. It shows his upper body, with his shoulders facing towards us and his head turned slightly to his left. He has pale peach skin, red hair and a beard. He is looking directly at us with a strong stare and closed lips. He has a long thin nose and is wearing a flat black hat with a white feather resting on top. He is finely dressed, in a white linen shirt beneath a slashed gold doublet, a tight-fitting jacket, that has been decorated with jewels. His white shirt has been purposely pulled through the diamond-shaped cuts to create puffs of white material, the fashionable look of the period. He is wearing a dark fur coat that broadens his shoulders. The king’s hat casts a distinctive shadow across the dark green background of the painting.

### Brett Dolman

This is Henry VIII, painted in the 1530s, in his early forties, at the height of his powers and his ambition. The Flemish artist, Joost van Cleve, may have been commissioned to paint Henry's portrait to commemorate the meeting of Henry with Francis I, King of France, in 1532. Now, this is a portrait which should leave us in no doubt about the kind of image Henry wanted to project.

### Narrator

There may be another clue here that helps us understand Henry’s image.

Henry’s ringed hands are resting on a table with a red cushion. In his left hand, he holds a white paper scroll with a Latin inscription.

### Brett Dolman

The inscription in the painting, in Latin, is taken from the Christian New Testament. ‘Go thee into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’.

This was the mission of every European ruler, a statement of their devout faith, but also, sometimes, a justification for their political authority and their decisions. Europe, in the 1500s and 1600s, was ripped apart by wars of religion waged between Protestant and Catholic rulers, each certain of their spiritual claims.

### Narrator

There are two smaller portraits of other European kings, either side of Henry. They are both looking inwards towards the central painting.

### Narrator

These three kings represent a generation of European rulers, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to the left, Henry in the centre, and Francis I King of France to the right. Glenn Richardson tells us more.

### Glenn Richardson

All three of them knew each other very well. All three of them were obsessed with each other's political standing and their ambitions throughout their reigns.

They should all be great governors; they should maintain their authority and extend it as far as possible within their realms. And that they should be great patrons, both of nobility and also of the arts. And all three kings shared this view.

### Narrator

Their ambitions and rivalry meant that more often they competed with each other.

### Lois Taylor Biggs

My name is Lois Taylor Biggs. I am a curator, writer and art historian based in Chicago, Illinois. I am a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and of White Earth Ojibwe descent.

In this portrait, Henry VIII is projecting an image of imperial splendour, personal style and magnificence to convey his own image as a powerful ruler.

### Narrator

Between 1500 and 1600, European explorers had mapped and travelled the world, sometimes driven by the curiosity of discovery, often by the appetite for treasure. The ambitions set by these three kings and their successors laid the foundations of later European global empires, conquering lands of indigenous groups, like the White Earth nation to which Lois’ ancestors belonged.

### Lois Taylor Biggs

In this portrait, clearly there's a contrast between the grandeur of the portrait and the brutal realities of his colonial ambitions; between this image of grandeur between the words on the scroll and the vast centuries of exploitation and violence that followed.

### Narrator

To get to the next artwork turn 180 degrees so that you are facing the opposite wall. Walk 8 paces forward. There are three paintings on this wall, the painting of Anne Boleyn is in the centre.

## Stop 6 Anne Boleyn

### Narrator

This is a portrait of Henry VIII’s second queen Anne Boleyn in a framed panel, around half a metre each way. It shows her head and shoulders, turned slightly towards her right (the left of the painting). She has pale peach skin with dark eyes, and pink cheeks. Her hair is mostly concealed by a black headdress known as a French hood, with gold trim decorated with pearls. This curves in an elegant semicircle around her head, revealing a little of her dark reddish-brown hair. She wears a black dress also adorned with pearls with a low square neckline edged in gold and jewels. and no shift or smock underneath. Anne is wearing around her neck a gold chain and a rope of pearls with a gold pendant in the shape of a large letter ‘B’ with three pearl droplets hanging from it. The sleeves of her robe are decorated with a geometric pattern in gold. There is an inscription at the top of the painting that reads, ANNA BOLLINA UXOR HENRICI OCTAVI, which means ‘Anne, wife of Henry VIII’.

### Tracey Borman

I'm Tracey Borman, I'm the Joint Chief Curator at Historic Royal Palaces and I'm also a Tudor historian. She first arrived at the English court in 1522 and joined the household of the woman who she would bring down, Catherine. Anne crucially held out the promise of giving Henry the son and heir that he so desperately craved.

 On the 7th of September 1533, Anne gave birth to a healthy child. But it wasn't a son. It was the future Elizabeth I. It was the beginning of the end for Anne, because sadly she was unable to give Henry another living child.

She was swiftly condemned for adultery and treason and executed at the Tower of London on the 19th of May, 1536.

### Narrator

The painting before us was actually painted long after Anne’s execution. Tracey tells us more.

### Tracey Borman

This painting was likely commissioned not during Anne's lifetime but that of her daughter Elizabeth I when she was Queen of England. I think Anne would have liked the fact that she was so celebrated in the reign of her daughter, who was hugely influenced by her trailblazing mother.

In this painting, Anne wears one of the most famous pieces of jewellery associated with her, the B necklace. It's the one that we always hope to find hidden away in an attic somewhere at Hampton Court but sadly it is lost to history but it really became Anne's trademark and it's very proudly displayed here.

### Narrator

To your left, on the wooden interpretation panel, is another tactile artefact. It’s an enlarged replica of an intricate Tudor ring. You might be able to feel the design – a bull’s head and the letter ‘r’, surrounded by sunbeams and stars.

To get to the next artwork, turn right and walk 6 paces. There is a stone archway directly in front of you, that leads to the next gallery. There is also a doorway to a linenfold room on the left. This is a small wood panelled room that takes its name from the distinctive carved pattern of the wood. You’re welcome to go in, but there are no artworks in this space.

Otherwise, continue into the next gallery space through the archway ahead of you. The next artwork is on the wall to your immediate right, around the corner of the wooden barrier.

## Stop 7 Neptune Calms the Storm

### Narrator

This gallery space is darker than the previous space as there is less natural light. The walls are painted dark green, and the artworks are spotlit. It’s a smaller room with two glass display cases full of historic objects against two of the walls.

This artwork is an intricately woven rectangular tapestry measuring 3 metres tall by 2 and a half metres wide. It’s behind another wooden interpretation panel, on which you can feel a tactile piece of fabric that gives you an idea of how the tapestry is woven.

The tapestry itself is vibrantly coloured with blue, red and golden thread. In the centre, there is a scene of a fleet in a storm at sea, attacked and defended by battling figures representing gods and goddesses. On the left, an angry male figure in a blue robe is standing on a grassy bank. He aims a spear at the ships and holds a rope in his other hand, which releases a door. Underneath, the heads of three children emerge holding bellows that they point towards the Fleet.

A second male figure dressed in a red robe appears on the right, borne on a sea chariot drawn by two horses. Behind them there are many wooden ships struggling in the thrashing ocean. Above, two flying female figures, one in red and one in blue, look down onto the scene. The figure on the right carries a sceptre. The figure on the left pours calmer waters onto the sea. The tapestry is edged by a red banner, and intricate gold, floral detailing with medallions of classical warriors. Brett tells us more about what’s going on here.

### Brett Dolman

Juno, the queen of the gods, in the top right, has commanded Aeolus, ruler of the winds, pictured on the left with a spear, to raise a storm to destroy Aeneas’ ships, which you can see in the background. The winds are depicted as two boys with bellows in the bottom left.

Neptune, god of the ocean, intervenes on the right in his chariot to calm the storm. Aeneas was a prince who'd survived the famous Trojan War, despite being on the losing side, fleeing Troy with a small fleet, and ending up at the court of Dido, queen of Carthage, in North Africa. Aeneas and Dido fall in love, but the gods of the ancient world call Aeneas away from Carthage to fulfil his destiny as the founder of a great new civilisation that would become the Roman Empire.

In the 1500s, there was a particular group of artists working in Northern Europe whose skills were prized perhaps more than any other. Highly skilled weavers ran workshops that produced the most important artworks of the sixteenth century.

### Kate Orfeur

Hello, my name is Kate Orfeur and I am a tapestry conservator.

### Narrator

Kate is here to tell us more about the history of this particular tapestry.

### Kate Orfeur

This tapestry is from a set of five tapestries woven around 1525. The tapestries were designed and woven in Brussels, and due to their irregular sizes, may have been made to fit a specific location.

This tapestry is finely woven, fifteen warps per inch, with a wool warp and wefts of wool, silk and silver gilt metal threads. The weaving is of a high quality, with lavish detail and decoration on the sumptuous costume, architectural details and landscapes.

Fine Tudor tapestries like this one were woven using a palette of colours to indicate wealth and status. This can be seen in the generous use of bright red and blue colours in the design. The reds would have been made from expensive dyestuffs such as madder or cochineal, sourced from distant countries, including South America. These dyes would have had the added advantage of not fading as quickly as the cheaper dyestuffs available more locally.

### Narrator

To get to the next artwork, turn right and walk a couple of steps forward. The next artwork is above an empty stone fireplace. Just to note, there is no wooden barrier in front of this piece.

## Stop 8 A Protestant Allegory

### Narrator

This painting is just over half a metre tall by almost a metre wide. Visually, it’s very different to the other artworks on our tour. It has been painted in different shades of grey, with flecks of gold highlights. It shows four standing figures encircling three figures lying on the ground. The standing figures are barefoot and wearing loose fitting tunics. They each lift large stones, poised to throw them at the people on the ground. In the centre, one of the figures on the ground is reaching forward trying to gather objects including books that have been scattered on the floor. He has a long beard, and is wearing a tall papal hat and a long cape. Next to him, the other two figures lay lifeless with their eyes closed. The landscape background is rocky and mountainous. In the far-left corner of the painting, there is a city in the distance.

### Brett Dolman

Here is a painting that Henry himself owned. The four standing figures represent Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, the four authors of the Christian New Testament Gospels. They are hurling stones at the sprawling figure of the Pope, flanked by two female figures who are labelled Avarice and Hypocrisy. It was once common for artists to represent vices as female figures, temptations to be resisted.

### Narrator

This is a work of protestant propaganda, where the perceived indulgences of the Catholic Church are contrasted with the true word of God, delivered directly through the bible. This painting clearly demonstrates the religious tensions of the time, and particularly those that arose during and after Henry VIII’s reign.

### Brett Dolman

In 1534 Henry VIII declared himself to be the supreme head of a new Church of England, independent of the Roman Catholic Church. He justified this, to the wider world and to himself, as exercising his right, as king, to form a direct relationship with God, without the troublesome need of bowing to the Pope. Henry VIII's main motivation for his actions was not because he supported the more radical campaigns of Protestant reformers who thought the Catholic Church corrupt and misguided, but because he needed a divorce from his first queen, Catherine of Aragon, so that he could marry his second, Anne Boleyn.

Under the reign of Henry VIII's daughter Mary I, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, the positions on religion were all reversed, and it became an act of treason, punishable by death, to embrace the Protestant cause. Over the next centuries, from the reign of Henry's daughter Elizabeth I, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, it was ordinary Catholics who faced the most enduring persecution, right up until the 19th century.

### Narrator

To get to the next artwork, turn right and walk 5 paces. There is a doorway on your left. Turn and walk through 8 paces. The next painting is on the wall to your immediate left.

## Stop 9 The Embarkation at Dover

### Narrator

This gallery is a lighter space, with artificial lighting, and dominated by two paintings – easily the largest on our tour today. A 3-minute audio-visual show plays every 15 minutes. The lights will dim, and areas of the two paintings will be spotlit to draw out particular details.

This is a dramatic, large-scale oil painting on canvas in a carved blue and gold frame measuring 1 and a half metres tall by 3 and a half metres wide. It depicts a busy seascape of ships outside a harbour atop choppy waves, painted as vibrant blue swirls. In the middle of the painting are five Tudor warships. Three are grouped together in the centre left, while the other two are slightly higher in the composition, towards its top right-hand corner. All are side on, facing diagonally towards this top right corner, away from the land depicted in the bottom-left. Each ship has a brown wooden base, with white decks decorated with English royal and heraldic shields. They have large white sails, billowing in the wind and English flags wafting from the mast.

One of these ships, the fourth from the left, has golden sails and standing on the deck is a distant figure of Henry VIII surrounded by trumpeters and soldiers. On the boat closest to us, people are climbing on board from a small rowing boat. There are several more small boats rowing towards the ship, away from the land in the foreground. Here, on a long jetty between two defensive towers that runs along the bottom of the painting from the bottom-left, there are many different men and a few children, all waiting to embark on the ships. On the top of the two towers are men firing cannons to salute the fleet and waving more flags in celebration. In the background, there are many other ships, and a large castle on a hill in the back left corner.

This painting shows the English fleet setting sail en route to the Field of Cloth of Gold on 31 May 1520.

### Brett Dolman

On the left is Dover Castle and in the far distance, the coast of France. Henry VIII is seen in one of the big ships, all flying suitably celebratory streamers and heraldic banners.

The ships are not probably meant to be the ones that Henry actually travelled in, but were painted to represent the biggest ships in Henry's navy. This makes the painting more impressive. One of the ships is probably the famous Mary Rose, perhaps the largest ship depicted right in the front of the painting.

History paintings were part of Tudor propaganda, part of a visual language used by Henry VIII, along with costume, badges, and symbols and portraits, that advertised Tudor power and authority.

But these paintings are also full of people. Ordinary men and women. The supporting cast of thousands who built and supplied the English court on its travels.

### Rosanna de Sancha

My name is Rosanna de Sancha, and my official title is Senior Paintings Conservator in the Royal Collection Trust.

### Narrator

Both this painting and the one that hangs next to it - The Field of the Cloth of Gold - are examples of an important type of Tudor art – the history painting. They often formed a large series of artworks decorating important rooms at Tudor palaces. Rosanna tells us more about how they would have been painted.

### Rosanna de Sancha

There are very different skills in painting and we can see different hands at work. They've been commissioned to paint a similar group of figures, but they do them differently and for us, you know, it just feeds our natural sort of obsessive conservator type quality to distinguish between one person and another! And this very much lent us to thinking that within the painting there are different nationalities at work.

### Narrator

To get to the next artwork, turn to the right.

## Stop 10 The Field of Cloth of Gold

### Narrator

This large and equally dramatic landscape painting is very similar in size to the previous painting and is presented in the same blue and gold carved frame. It depicts a vast outdoor festival, spread across green hills. In the foreground on the left-hand side, a procession of hundreds of colourfully dressed men, some on horseback makes its way from a town, where spectators have gathered to watch. In the front left corner, the procession continues along a path, over a bridge towards a castle in the centre-left of the painting. In the middle of the group Henry VIII, the largest figure visible, is dressed in a golden cape and riding on horseback. In the top right corner, hundreds more gather to watch a joust taking place on a sports field. Elsewhere, there are scenes of elegantly dressed men and women attending banquets, while cooks and servants prepare and serve food. In the top left of the painting, a kite in the shape of a dragon flies across the sky.

### Brett Dolman

In June 1520, Henry VIII met Francis I, King of France, for the first time at a celebratory sporting tournament and festival held in a small patch of English territory near Calais in what is now, of course, France.

England and France had been at war just a few years before, but now they were united in a pact of friendship, championed by the Pope and organised by Thomas Wolsey.

### Narrator

This painting isn’t a straightforward depiction of events, though.

### Brett Dolman

The Field of Cloth of Gold is a complicated painting. I like to think of it as a highlights reel, where different moments of what was actually a three-week event are shown all together in one picture. You have the arrival of Henry VIII at the centre of a huge procession, but you can also find Henry again greeting Francis in the golden tent, and watching the sporting tournaments in the top right hand corner.

### Narrator

This painting shows that no expense was spared on Henry’s competition with Francis.

In the centre-right of the painting, dominating the foreground, there is a large grey palace, with an elaborate wine fountain in front of it. The palace is built in a classical style, seemingly out of stone with large glass windows and red brick towers at the corners and framing an open arched gateway at its centre. The roof of the building is decorated with sculpture. The palace, however, was only a temporary construction.

Alden Gregory, Curator of Historic Buildings for Historic Royal Palaces, tells us more.

### Alden Gregory

This was Henry's great centrepiece of his encampment and not even the painting can do it justice. Each side of this huge building was over 100 metres long, that's more than 300 feet. That was bigger than Hampton Court was at the time. And it contained suites of rooms that were furnished with the finest art and tapestries, where the court could feast and entertain. While at the back of the palace, there was a fully fitted out chapel to support the daily round of religious services. But Francis wasn't to be outdone.

### Narrator

In the background there are many different painted tents scattered across the landscape. In a large golden tent, two men wrestle, watched by a great crowd.

### Alden Gregory

That tent was reportedly 120 feet tall, so that's more than 35 metres, and was completely covered in expensive cloth of gold. It must have been one of the largest and most costly tents ever built. But what the painting doesn't show is that the weather was terrible in June 1520, and this extraordinary tent blew down in the wind!

### Narrator

There’s another tactile piece of material set into the wooden interpretation panel in front of this painting. It gives you an idea of the colourful designs used to decorate these tents.

This is the final artwork in the tour.

## Stop 11 Farewell

### Narrator

This brings us to the end of our tour through the Wolsey Rooms.

### Brett Dolman

The 1500s were a time of great change and challenge for English people. The Tudor dynasty that ruled England from 1485 until 1603 laid the foundations for the country's economic and political expansion and exploitation over the next three hundred years, the beginning of a journey toward a colonial empire that would affect the lives of millions around the globe.

### Narrator

Today, the Tudor period is most often remembered for Henry VIII and his Six Queens. But in this tour, we’ve heard how the history of their reign is much more complex.

### Brett Dolman

The Tudor dynasty has left behind a mixed legacy.  But it has left us with the wonderful architecture of Hampton Court and the fascinating artworks and objects that can help us understand the world of the 1500s. I hope that this tour through the Wolsey Rooms has given you a glimpse into the Tudor world and in particular how ordinary lives were affected by the great changes of this momentous era.

### Narrator

We’ve reached the end of our tour of the Tudor world, but you can find more stories about the sixteenth century in the rooms underneath the Wolsey Rooms told through interactive displays and handling objects.

### Narrator

To leave this space, facing the Field of Cloth of Gold, turn around 180 degrees and move around 5 paces to the doorway in the left corner of the room. There is a step up through the door. As you enter the hallway, you may notice the natural light. To your right, there is a stone staircase that takes you down to the ground floor.

Move one and a half flights down to the ground floor, taking care as some of the stone steps are uneven. At the bottom, go through the door to your right and you will enter a long corridor. Its long left-hand wall is lined with four marble busts set atop plinths. These are figures from the Tudor royal family. Be careful of the low rope that surrounds them at shin level.

Head all the way down the corridor, past the busts, and through the doorway at the end. You will emerge into a large, high-ceilinged stairwell with elaborate frescoes decorating the huge walls and ceiling. Head forward through the large wooden door to your left, which might be closed. You’re now back in Clock Court by the white columns.

To get to the downstairs Tudor World exhibition, go through the door to your left. Otherwise, Base Court – where all our other tours start from – is through the large archway across the courtyard diagonally to the right.

Thank you for taking this tour.

## [End of Tour]