



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

dress codes

A Guide for School and
Community Group Visits

SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

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

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INTRODUCTION

Dress codes define what we wear and therefore how the rest of the world sees us. This is true both historically and today – we all follow, make or break dress codes, using what we wear to represent who we are and what we do. We may know of famous outfits from the past – for example, this exhibition includes pieces worn by high profile and royal figures such as Queen Victoria and Diana, Princess of Wales. However, we don't necessarily think about why they were worn, and the thought that went into creating and selecting them. The Dress Codes exhibition brings the factors and influences behind these decisions to light and explores the theme of rules by which we all dress: written and unwritten, formal and informal.

Presenting 34 amazing outfits from the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, Dress Codes is an exciting opportunity to view both recognisable, showstopping creations and never-before seen treasures of the collection. Alongside outfits from the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection, we have creations from Young Producers – local to Kensington Palace and aged between 14 and 17 – who were inspired by our collection and their own dress codes. They created stories, films, music, and their own outfits, and their contributions are a core part of *Dress Codes*, including a room dedicated to their fashion creations at the end of the exhibition.

This guide has been designed to support teachers and Community Access Scheme (CAS) group leaders as they prepare to bring groups to experience the exhibition, navigating potentially challenging content or logistics and ensuring a positive experience before, during and after the visit.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Dress Codes: Decoding the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection takes place in the Pigott Gallery at Kensington Palace from 13 March to 30 November 2025. Entry is included with palace admission. We anticipate it will take about 30 minutes to explore the exhibition, though groups may wish to take longer if desired.

BOOKING TICKETS

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

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

Community Access Scheme group visits can be booked using the standard CAS group visit booking form.

Community Access Scheme ‘Free Visit’ cards (‘CAS cards’) can be used during the time of this exhibition and do not need to be pre-booked. Please exchange the cards for tickets at the Kensington Palace ticket office. If the palace is fully booked on the day you wish to visit, you will not be able to visit using these cards on the day. We always recommend, and prefer, groups to pre-book.

All under-16s must be accompanied by someone aged 18+ when visiting and at all times within the palace. Adults are required to accompany children in line with the following ratios:

age 0-4 years = 1:4

age 4-7 years = 1:5

age 7-15 years = 1:10

age 16+ years = 1:15

GETTING TO THE PALACE

Parking

Unfortunately, we do not have a car park for visitors at Kensington Palace.

If you plan to arrive by coach, the drop off point is Orme Square Gate. There is private coach parking available off Bayswater Road near the Palace. Contact [Euro Car Parks](#) on 020 7563 3000 for prices and to book. This is a 10-15 minute walk from the palace.

For CAS groups, we have some limited capacity to offer accessible parking to blue badge holders. If this is an option you’d like to explore, please contact a member of the Communities team with at least two weeks’ notice. Contact emails are at the end of this guide.

We will require the following information:

- Vehicle registration number
- Blue Badge ID number
- Estimated time of arrival

Minibus/taxi drop off

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

We will require the following information:

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

Vehicle access is via a small road at Orme Square Gate; please use the following What3Words (what3words.com) code to navigate to the entrance: **hike.freed.trades**. Please drive carefully through the park.

Travelling by tube

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

From Queensway Underground Station (Central Line) to the palace entrance it is 728m (0.45 miles) through Kensington Gardens, entering the park via Black Lion Gate.

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

Travelling by bus

Routes 94, 148 and 274 stop along Bayswater Road. Routes 9, 49, 52, 710, 452 stop along Kensington High Street.

ARRIVING AT THE PALACE

On arrival, CAS group leaders with ticket-only bookings should make themselves known to a team member in the Ticket Office who will pass on paper tickets for the whole group.

For school visits or Kensington CAS groups who have also booked to use the Clore Learning Space, please make your way directly to the Clore Learning Centre where a member of the Schools & Communities team will meet you.

Bag searches

When entering the palace, everyone must go through the bag search. This is necessary to ensure all our visitors are protected whilst they are on site. All searches are carried out by professionals trained to identify offending articles. Our team are friendly and welcoming, and will make the experience as stress-free as possible. To help with this, please encourage your students and group members to ‘pack light’, only bringing what is necessary.

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

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

Additional guidance for School Visits is available in [Kensington Palace Schools’ Essential Information 2023/24](#). More [Security Information](#) can be found on our website.



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ACCESSIBILITY

Dress Codes will take place in the Pigott Gallery, which is located near to the Queen’s State Apartments route. You may visit the exhibition on its own, or alongside visits to the other routes (The King’s State Apartments, The Queen’s State Apartments, and Victoria: A Royal Childhood).

Please bear in mind the following practicalities of visiting the gallery:

- The exhibition is wheelchair accessible – the step-free route is made available on request, so please ask a Palace Host (member of staff in red uniform) for assistance.
- The gallery may be crowded with many visitors visiting the exhibition at the same time.
- The exhibition follows a linear route through the gallery. Visitors will be continually moving through the exhibition.
- Short queues may form at the start and at various points throughout the exhibition.
- There are few places for people to stop and sit.
- Groups will be discouraged from gathering.
- Groups are unable to exit the exhibition until it is completed.

WAYS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Our Curatorial and Interpretation teams worked closely with young people to create different ways to access and engage with the exhibition's narrative and themes:

- Blue panels display the exhibition text created by Historic Royal Palaces staff
- Pink panels display content and interpretation created by the Dress Codes Young Producers
- All text panels are laid out in easy-to-follow bullet point text
- Object labels are laid out in the following format:
Name of the outfit and wearer
Name of the designer
Date the outfit was made or used
Code: What dress code is the outfit following?
Why: Why is the code being followed?
How: How does the outfit follow, bend or break the code? What are the symbols, shape, cut and style telling you?
- There are films throughout the exhibition created by the Young Producers, taking inspiration from the objects and stories on display
- There is music playing within the exhibition, some created by the Young Producers and some by composer Charlotte Harding
- There is fashion created by the Young Producers in the final room of the exhibition, with text panels exploring their inspiration and creative processes



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POTENTIAL CONTENT TRIGGERS

Dress Codes includes items and stories that explore some challenging or upsetting themes and aspects of history. Potential triggers within the exhibition include: death and mourning, loss of an adult child, loss of a spouse, Nazism and Adolf Hitler, servitude, and class.

The Kensington Palace Host team will be present and able to talk to visitors about these themes and provide practical support as required.

In order to ensure your group is adequately prepared for the visit, please see the **Before Your Visit** and **Exhibition Guide** sections below for further information on these themes.

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

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

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

THE EXHIBITION FOLLOWS FIVE THEMES:

Writing the codes: How are dress codes created, who creates them, and what do they involve?

Following the codes: How do dress codes change between different settings and situations? How can they be used to convey messages about the wearer?

Decoding the materials: Explore the fabrics commonly used for different dress codes.

Cracking the codes: How have famous royal figures from the past used or shifted dress codes to create distinctive styles and identities?

Resetting the codes: The work of the Young Producers explores how dress codes can evolve for today's world.

The items on display are from the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection

- The Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection (RCDC) is a collection of 10,000 items of historic dress and related material cared for by Historic Royal Palaces.
- The RCDC is researched and cared for by a team of curators and specialist conservators, keeping the items in good condition for generations to come.
- By collecting and caring for the RCDC, we can learn about the history of fashion, life at court, British ceremonial traditions, and the lives of key historical figures.
- Some of the people who wore these outfits were ordinary people, from workers in the palaces to a little girl attending Elizabeth II's coronation, while others were very famous. For example, you will see several outfits worn by Diana, Princess of Wales, and by Princess Margaret, both of whom are remembered as being particularly fashionable figures.
- The collection on display in Dress Codes represents over 300 years of fashion.

- The fashion within the RCDC is from and was worn all over the world, including a rare Japanese court suit, and dresses worn on official royal engagements in Saudi Arabia and the Philippines. Some items draw inspiration from other cultures and nationalities, such as Professor Sir Aziz Sheikh's sherwani, worn for his 2023 investiture. This garment represented his Pakistani cultural origins and following South Asian formal dress codes.



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Dress Codes was co-created with 25 Young Producers from our local community

- The Young Producers were part of youth organisations City Lions, Harrow Club and Nova New Opportunities
- We worked with the Young Producers to co-create dress codes in order to ensure that the exhibition was relevant, meaningful and inclusive to our local community.
- The Young Producers brought their insightful perspectives, fresh thinking and creativity to the exhibition, and enabled us to think about what dress codes mean to us today, and how they might develop with future generations.
- The Young Producers created stories, films, music, and their own outfits. Their creations are a core part of Dress Codes, with their contributions running throughout the exhibition. There is also a room entirely dedicated to their fashion creations at the end of the exhibition.



Suggested questions to consider before your visit:

- What do you think are the biggest differences between clothes worn in the 1700s and clothes worn today?
- What do you think are the challenges of keeping an outfit in good condition for hundreds of years?
- If you were to choose one item of your own clothing to be kept by historians and put on display in 100 years, what would you choose and why? What could future generations learn about you from just this item?
- How do people use their clothing to shape and display their identity?
- What does following a dress code mean to people in 2025?

EXHIBITION GUIDE

The visitor route is a linear route through the Kensington Palace Pigott Gallery. Please ask a member of staff in red uniform for directions after your group has passed through bag check.

THE EXHIBITION FOLLOWS THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

WRITING THE CODES

Dress codes can be written and formal: a rule defined through law, regulations or instructions. For example, the Yeomen Warders at the Tower of London have official uniforms which they must wear while on duty. This is a formal written dress code - and one of these uniforms is on display as part of this exhibition!

Dress codes can also be unwritten and informal. For example, people often 'dress up' for a party because that's what is expected at a large social occasion, even if it's not formally required by the host.

FOLLOWING THE CODES

Different settings require different dress codes – some more elaborate, some more practical – all of which have evolved and developed over the past 300 years. In the Dress Codes exhibition, we explore:

Dressing for Court: from the 1700s to present day, dressing to attend a royal court has always required you to dress your best. However, codes have become less rigorous as time has gone on, and people from every background now attend the royal court to be honoured for their achievements.

Dressing for Ceremony: at royal occasions, dress codes tend to emphasise ceremony and splendour, impressing spectators while maintaining tradition and history.

Dressing for Politics: clothes aren't just surface level, and diplomatic uniforms have historically been an important way of conveying authority, status, culture and identity. Symbols, patterns and colours can have deliberate deeper meanings connected to the wearer's background or beliefs.

Dressing for Work: uniforms are both practical items and a way to create a sense of belonging and identity within an official workplace. Uniforms in royal settings follow particularly strict codes, based upon protocols which can be hundreds of years old.

Dressing for Occasions: parties are not only fun, but important markers of milestones in our lives. From debutante balls to royal fancy dress, parties have always given guests a chance to look their best – often following a dress code written on an invitation.

Dressing for Rites of Passage: Important social rites of passage include Weddings, funerals, birthdays, or graduations, all of which have specific dress codes. These differ between cultures and traditions, with many rules that people begin to learn from childhood.

White is now the traditional and most common colour for wedding dresses in Britain, a trend set by Queen Victoria's marriage in 1840. However, in many other cultures, wedding clothes may be bright colours or heavily bejewelled, and white is seen as a colour for funerals and mourning. White has also been worn in Britain for mourning, as seen in Queen Alexandra's white and mauve mourning dress, while black mourning attire can be seen represented by Queen Victoria's dress.

DECODING MATERIALS

Creating clothing isn't just about how they look, but how they feel. Visitors to Dress Codes can experience this with a fabric wall, where you can reach out and touch the material that goes into different types of outfits: day wear, occasion wear and uniform. The materials for every day clothing need to be durable and easy to clean, whereas outfits for special occasions can be more expensive and heavily decorated with beads or embellishments. Uniform material also has lots of embellishment, but for more specific reasons: the raised gold embroidery signifies status, so the more embroidery, the higher your rank.

Sensory input isn't just about sight and touch, but about sound as well. The music within Dress Codes is specially composed to reflect the process of making clothes. Charlotte Harding created the music in the same way that a designer might create clothes, using 'Stitches' – short, sharp notes like a running stitch, 'Threads' – a melody that sounds like it's weaving, and 'Panels' – smooth chords that sparkle like fabric in the light.

CRACKING THE CODES

Rather than following them exactly, many people use dress codes as a starting point from which they can bend the rules, wearing clothes in a way that expresses their identity and own unique style. Once you know the rules of dress and how to make them work for your individual style, you have cracked the code.

Some members of the royal family have iconic style and are instantly recognisable. Their dress sense helps define how we see and think of them. Members of the royal family dress to communicate their official role, show respect to their hosts or to express what is important to them. Their clothing choices can follow society's conventions, or challenge them, setting trends. Like everyone, members of the royal family also dress to express their taste and personality.

An example of a royal with iconic style, and a fashion risk taker, was Kensington Palace resident Princess Margaret. She made exciting fashion choices, working with the latest British and international designers in the 'swinging' 1960s and 1970s when London was a vibrant centre of fashion, culture, music and art. In living here at Kensington Palace, Margaret turned it into a place where creative people gathered, reflecting her connections to the arts and culture scene in her own sense of style. Her bold and beautiful fashion choices were reported in the press and even garnered a name: 'The Margaret Look'. Imagine a style named after yourself – what do you think 'The Look' would be with you as the inspiration?



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RESETTING THE CODES

Dress codes are always evolving, and it's often young creatives who are pushing this change. To continue this evolution, Historic Royal Palaces worked with Young Producers – 25 local young people aged between 14 – 17, who took inspiration from the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection to bring historical codes into the modern day. Their fashion designs mix traditional silhouettes and dress conventions with modern fabrics and styles and express themes of power, femininity and diverse cultural influences. Their music compositions build on these themes, exploring dressing to feel powerful, representing our identities, and putting our best foot forward.

AFTER YOUR VISIT

We hope you enjoyed your visit to Dress Codes: Decoding the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection. Below are some extension questions and activities to do with your group or independently.

Questions for discussion:

- Which outfit did you find most memorable, and why? Were there any that you wouldn't mind wearing?
- Were there any rules or codes that were new to you or surprised you? Were there any of your own codes that you would add?
- Are there any aspects of clothing or clothing rules from before the 21st century that you would like to see more commonly today?
- What do you think was the biggest difference between dress codes in the 17th century and dress codes today?
- Outfits have to serve a variety of purposes for the wearer: practical, aesthetic and symbolic. If you were to design an outfit for a special occasion, what factors would you keep in mind?
- The way you dress can create a sense of belonging and commonality, but it can also be a way to express identity and individuality. In what ways does what you wear on a day to day basis make you feel part of a community? In what ways does it make you feel unique?

THINGS TO DO

Fashion + Textile Museum

The Fashion + Textile Museum is the only UK museum dedicated to showcasing contemporary fashion and textile design, displaying a broad range of innovative fashion and textiles from designers and makers around the world and exploring the relation between people and our materials.

www.fashiontextilemuseum.org

Victoria and Albert Museum

Spanning five centuries, the V&A's Fashion collection is among the largest and most comprehensive collection of dress in the world. Key items in the collection include rare 17th century gowns, 18th century 'mantua' dresses, 1930s eveningwear, 1960s daywear and post-war couture. You can visit the museum in person, or see their digitised fashion archive at www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion

Fashion History from the 18th to the 20th Century, the Kyoto Institute

This book showcases the vast collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute while considering the clothes from sociological, historical, and artistic perspectives. The book's authors include Akiko Fukai (Chief Curator of The Kyoto Costume Institute) among others.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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

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

