# William III's Apartments Audio Tour

# Hampton Court Palace

## Overview

Visit the King's state apartments then meet the man beneath the crown in his private rooms.

## Stop 1 Introduction in Clock Court

### Narrator

In 1688, almost 150 years after Henry VIII’s death, a revolution at court overthrew England’s last Catholic king, James II. Leading nobles and politicians invited his daughter, Mary, together with her Dutch husband, Prince William of Orange, to rule England jointly as King and Queen.

The couple soon decided to rebuild Hampton Court and came close to demolishing Henry’s palace in its entirety, but short of cash, they made do with rebuilding a third of it in the new Baroque style. As a result, Hampton Court was given a new lease of life, as building site and a work place. With hundreds of people labouring in front and behind the scenes; Marshalls, heralds, ushers, architects, painters, wood and stone carvers, bricklayers cooks, cleaners, gardeners. Today the staff of Historic Royal Palaces fill these shoes, you may see us working on conservation projects, or in the gardens, cooking in the kitchens or serving in the shops. And you will find us waiting to answer your questions and point you in the right direction throughout the palace. Please ask any of us about this palaces many stories.

## Stop 2 Entrance

### Narrator

Before we go on into the building, look at this colonnade for a moment. The style is deliberately flamboyant, to signal the arrival of a new King from the continent.

William’s original plan is to demolish Hampton Court completely, and rebuild it all, but he is too short of money. He prefers to spend his cash on his endless wars, mainly against the Catholic king of France, and this budgetary constraint partly explains the mis-match of styles in the courtyard here.

Although Queen Mary, as the daughter of King James the Second, has a stronger claim to the throne than William, she stays very much in the background politically, preferring a life of relative quiet and retirement. But because her husband is so often away at the wars, Mary sometimes finds herself thrust into the political arena, and she also finds herself overseeing the extensive building works here at Hampton Court.

### Narrator

Let’s go on now, through the tallest door at the end of the colonnade.

## Stop 3 King’s Staircase

### Narrator

In front of us is the grand staircase that leads to the King’s apartments. Don’t go up just yet, but find a convenient place to stand. On this, a court day, it is lined with the yeoman of the guard, and a mob is trying to get into the rooms above. It’s a little bit like a film premiere – outside commoners will push and shove to get a glimpse of our clothes, and we privileged few are dressed in the best and latest fashions. The staircase has an obvious symbolic function – like all the public rooms it is designed to impress. We are going up to meet the King and Queen, because they are elevated beings, and in order to be with them, we must achieve a higher plane.

If you set off up the stairs now, you’ll notice that the steps are very shallow. They demand a slow, stately pace. And looking up, you’ll notice that the higher level we’re slowly approaching is not very high at all.

One suggested explanation is that, because William suffered dreadfully from asthma he wasn’t able to walk up too many stairs. It’s true that William’s health is poor, but that’s probably not the real reason; once again, the architect has had to accommodate the existing Tudor building, and it is this that has dictated the lower level.

Pause to look at the scenes painted on the walls as you go up – these are also intended to present an impressive image of the king. On the wall opposite the door you came in by is a grand scene described as the ‘Victory of Alexander over the Caesars’, by the Italian artist Verrio. The group of men at the bottom right-hand-side of the picture are the 12 Caesars – and they represent the Catholic forces that William has ousted in the Glorious Revolution. He, of course, is the hero Alexander, on the left-hand-side, wearing a helmet and a blue cloak.

## Stop 3a Verrio's Painting

### Narrator

The Surveyor of the Queen’s Pictures, Desmond Shawe-Taylor :

### Shawe-Taylor

On the continent during the 17th Century, it’s absolutely standard to devise insanely boastful allegories in which the King is depicted as Apollo or Jupiter or Hercules, and this would be true in France, Germany, Italy, anywhere, it wouldn’t matter.

The English felt they had to slightly catch up with this notion so, in this decorative scheme, the idea is that William is depicted as Alexander the Great and the essence is that Alexander the Great is found to be superior in courage and morality to all the Caesars, to all the Roman Emperors who are normally considered to be the noblest or grandest people from antiquity. William chooses this allegory so that it can be shown that he, William, trumps all his predecessors on the English throne, (…) so it’s a kind of a way of reinforcing his otherwise fairly dubious dynastic claim to the throne.

In the allegory you see all the Caesars lined up, (…) and opposite them Alexander the Great, being recommended by Hercules, so Hercules is going to raise him up to heaven so that he can dine at the table of the Gods on Olympus as it were, and it’s a very, very characteristic, illusionistic device that the architecture is open to the sky. It’s all part of the various stages of grandeur - the eye-level, fairly low, a little bit above eye-level, grand, but worldly, straight up you’re looking at heaven and the ultimate destination of the English monarchs.

## Stop 4 Enter the Guard Chamber

### Narrator

You will now have reached the top of the staircase. On court days a yeoman-usher stands here, and he decides who will be allowed to enter the apartments. Fortunately, almost anyone who is anyone is allowed in here – as long as you are well-dressed you can walk right in.

As you go in, note the marbling on the door-post – it’s an elaborate paint effect – William is saving money again. So let’s go on now, into the Guard Chamber.

## Stop 5 Guard Chamber

### Narrator

This is the Guard Chamber, and in King William’s day there are as many as forty yeoman-guards in attendance here, and they are not merely for decoration or crowd control. These are dangerous times, the King has many enemies, and assassination attempts are not unknown. The guards even sleep here in this room, when the king is in residence.

Look at the remarkable collection of weapons on the walls. They have been arranged by John Harris, William’s Gunsmith and Decorator Extraordinary. Harris also has the job of keeping this display bright, and every year the weapons are cleaned and refurbished. But they can still be taken down for use as occasion demands.

The yeomen are more than just bodyguards. They also impose etiquette – and court etiquette is vital for William’s public image.

This Guard chamber is a public room, and a surprising number of the public are allowed in. William’s court exerts a powerful pull; it is the centre of political, social and economic power, and a sort of permanent party. At court you might get a job, in the church, the justice-system, the foreign service, and so on. Or you might just be out for a free meal and a wonderful bit of gossip, but whatever your position or ambitions, this is the place to be.

Any lady or gentleman dressed correctly is almost certain to be admitted to this outermost room. If you are a man, you are wearing a full-bottomed wig and sword, and a knee-length coat and waistcoat. If you are a woman, you are wearing a loose gown called a mantua. But as we go through the rooms, you’ll find that conditions of entry become more and more exclusive, as we approach the presence of the King himself.

Let’s move on now, into the next room. At the door stands a gentleman usher. He’ll give us the once over, and he’ll open the door to us if he recognises us as ‘gentlemen of quality and of good fashion, or the wives and daughter of the nobility’.

## Stop 6 Presence Chamber

### Narrator

This room is known as the Presence Chamber. It is the official throne room, and at the end of the room you can see the chair of estate under its formal canopy. Otherwise this room is pretty much empty, as are most of the public apartments that you will see today. These rooms may strike you as a bit bare, but the fact is that they were designed as meeting spaces, and when they are functioning, and full of ushers and courtiers and guards and ministers and visiting dignitaries, there is little room for anything else.

On the wall to your left as you enter the room there is a portrait of William. Let’s go and have a look at that first. This enormous picture of William on horseback was painted in 1701, by Godfrey Kneller, and intended for this very position. The military pose is absolutely typical; William is a soldier first and foremost. Brave and determined, although not particularly successful, he goes every spring to the continent, and stays there, sometimes for as much as eight months of the year, fighting the French. And although the Glorious Revolution, by which he overthrew James the Second and took the throne, was a relatively bloodless affair in England, William has had to fight for his dominions, in Ireland for instance, at the battle of the Boyne. Despite his asthma he leads from the front, and has been wounded more than once.

This portrait shows him in a martial pose, but it also sends another message. The young ladies in the foreground, in the lower right-hand corner of the painting, represent peace and prosperity. The picture is saying that, after the upheaval of the Glorious Revolution, and before that the prolonged chaos of the English Civil War, which ended only a few decades ago, William is now bringing tranquillity and stability to his troubled realm. All the court etiquette that functions here reflects this pre-occupation with calm and order. By paying reverence to the king here, and obeying the rules, order will be restored.

So where is the king today? Not sitting on that throne. William is not fond of formal public occasions, and rarely uses this room. But no-one else is allowed to sit there, or even stand under the canopy, and even when it is empty courtiers are obliged to bow to it.

## Stop 6a Tapestries

### Narrator

Let’s take a closer look at the tapestry that hangs next to the picture of William on horseback. This tapestry features the mythological hero Hercules; you can see him standing in the centre, leaning on his club, and wrapped in his trademark lion-skin. William seems to associate his own brave deeds with the labours of Hercules, which you can see being performed on either side of this central panel. If we start at the left-hand side, you can see Hercules holding the world on his back, having taken over the task from the giant Atlas, then slaying the Cretan bull, then the Nemean lion. Beyond the central panel he is in action again, wrestling with the giant Antaeus, then slaying a centaur, and finally shooting down a covey of monstrous flying creatures.

This tapestry originally belonged to Henry the Eighth, and was commissioned by him in the sixteenth century. William, has inherited it as part of the royal collection, and hopes that by displaying Henry’s tapestries, he is associating himself with another great English king.

## Stop 7 Eating Room

### Narrator

We’ve entered the eating room, and once again it’s virtually empty. It is intended to be used when the King dines in public. Believe it or not, the seventeenth and eighteenth century monarchs do sometimes allow their meal-times to be a public spectacle. Such occasions are open to any persons of good fashion and good appearance who have a desire to see the monarch at lunch, and they are very popular.

William, however, hates the idea, and does not dine in public – he is a private man, with no love of ceremony, so during his time here there is no show of table-ware, crystal and silver. This may well be a mistake on his part. Public dining seems to be an effective public relations exercise – people like it. They like to see their king tucking in to his food, and William, as a foreign incomer, needs all the popularity he can get.

This room may be relatively bare, but it is still opulently fitted-out to create an atmosphere of luxury and grandeur. Look at the white silk damask curtains that hang above the windows, and the elaborate mirrors or pier-glasses between, each flanked by stands or torchères. These pier-glasses and stands have been introduced by the architect William Talman. He uses fabrics and trimmings that increase in richness as we go through the rooms, adding to the sense of hierarchy as we draw nearer to the royal presence.

In particular, don’t miss the wood-carvings over the fireplace, which frame the portrait that hangs there. These incredibly ornate, delicate, virtuoso carvings are the work of Grinling Gibbons, a master-craftsman of the seventeenth century, and you can see his work everywhere in these rooms.

## Stop 7a Grinling Gibbons' Carvings

### Narrator

Go and have a closer look at the carvings. The decoration is really breathtaking. Look at the way the lime-wood has been made to imitate folded drapery, fruit, flowers and ropes of leaves. Look at the astonishingly delicate crest that tops the whole thing, of arching wheat and palm-fronds.

This glorious construction is built up out of separately carved layers, created in the workshop, and then attached by nails to small concealed platforms within the assembly.

The artist responsible for these wonders, Grinling Gibbons, comes from a lowly back-ground - he is the son of a tradesman, a draper – brought up and trained in the Netherlands. He builds his reputation gradually in the second half of the seventeenth century. William appoints his master carver in 1693, and Gibbons scoops the job from a rival craftsman, partly perhaps because having trained in the Netherlands he speaks Dutch, which is William’s first language. By the end of his career he will be an acknowledged master, running an extensive workshop, quite an achievement for the son of a humble cloth-seller.

### Narrator

Let’s move on now, into the next room. As you reach the door, you will be examined once again by the Groom of the Privy Chamber. He is only prepared to let you into the next room if you are a holder of high office, or a peer of the realm, or -woman of good rank. So think yourself honoured to be allowed to pass.

## Stop 8 Privy Chamber

### Narrator

We’ve reached the high-point of the processional-route - the most important ceremonial room in William’s palace. Though it is called the privy or private chamber, there is nothing private about it. Look at the throne and canopy – they are the most elaborate we have yet seen. Here the monarch is supposed to sit on high-days and holidays, to listen to his birthday ode, or to greet foreign ambassadors.

This room is specifically designed to impress such visitors. If you look out of the windows, you can see that it overlooks the centre of the garden. If you are standing in front of the canopy, bowing before his majesty, you will have the impression that the garden is part of the fixtures and fittings – perhaps the most important element – showing how the King’s taste and order extend right into the outside world.

Fade up chit chat and laughter and feint music.

The canopy above the throne is covered by crimson silk damask, and enriched with scrolls of gold thread laces and gold thread fringe. The chandelier that hangs before it is made of rock-crystal.

When this room is not being used for William’s ceremonial occasions it sometimes becomes a venue for parties and balls, when the candle-light glitters on the crystals of the chandelier, and is reflected in the pier-glasses, and the open spaces of the rooms are filled with gorgeously-dressed courtiers, drinking and flirting.

Our route through these public rooms is reaching its climax. Let’s leave the Privy chamber now, and move on into the next room. Here, finally, we will meet the king himself. When you are ready to be introduced to the royal presence, go through the doorway.

## Stop 9 Withdrawing Room

### Narrator

Here in the withdrawing room we will finally meet the king himself. You are very honoured to be admitted. Only the most important people are allowed into this room, secretaries of state, the chief officers of the court, and, on special occasions and strictly by invitation, other guests. High pomp is put aside; the king will receive us sitting in this simple armchair – there’s no canopy, no chandelier. This is where real business is done – where favourites are courted, power-play conducted, and where, by testing and conversing with his ministers, the King will determine the extent - and limitations - of his power.

The courtier before you has stepped back, your patron gives you the nod, the king smiles, and you are introduced. Step forward, go down on your right knee and kiss the royal hand. And then, before you know it, you are exchanging pleasantries with your sovereign. William is not a great conversationalist. He will remark on the dreadful English weather, perhaps, or ask after your health, or how long you have been in town. Now you must step back, and make three low bows or curtsies, making sure that you do not turn your back on the king, but edge decorously away, and let some other exalted individual take your place. Never mind - you have touched greatness!

Now that you’ve caught your breath, look around, and appreciate the elaborate silver sconces hanging from the red cords, and - here’s a thing – the picture, directly opposite where the King is sitting. It is a portrait of King Charles the First. This is perhaps an unexpected choice for this room. Both William and Mary are related to Charles the First, so it reminds us of their family connections. But on the other hand, what a memento to hang opposite your throne – a picture of the king who had his head cut off by a rebellious Parliament. What is William saying with this choice? Surely, that he won’t forget the Civil War; and accepts that English monarchs must now share power with Parliament.

When you’re ready, move on into the next room.

## Stop 10 Great Bedchamber

### Narrator

This is the Great Bedroom. You might think that, having reached William’s bedroom, we have come to the end of the public, ceremonial route, but that is not strictly true, and, if anything, this room is even more luxurious.

Look at the painted ceiling. Like the grand allegorical painting on the staircase, this is another of Verrio’s works– showing the youth Endymion at rest in the arms of Morpheus, the god of sleep. But note the way the picture is oriented; to be seen from where we are standing, by the windows. If you were lying in bed and looking up at it, you’d think it was upside down.

In fact, this is not really a private room at all, and the King rarely sleeps here.

In this room noble companions of the king take over the functions of attendants from the gentlemen-ushers who preside over the previous rooms. There are six ‘Lords’ of the bedchamber, and William’s closest friends are among them. With their assistance, he is supposed to take part in a ritual of shaving and dressing. In fact, William’s hatred of all the formal trappings and ceremonies of kingship means that once again this room is probably not much used.

This ritual of the monarch eating, drinking and sleeping in public is a French fashion, and William feels that he has to follow suit – the French set the standard in everything. William needs to compete with them culturally and architecturally, as well as in politics and on the battlefield. His real obsession, though, is warfare, not the rhetorical gestures of court ceremony.

On the mantelpiece in this room is a collection of porcelain amassed by Queen Mary.

## Stop 10a Mary’s Ceramics

### Narrator

One of Mary’s passions is for porcelain, and what we see here today is only a tiny fraction of what was once a large and important collection. The over-mantles on which the pieces stand were expressly designed for this purpose. Mary doesn’t mass her collection together in one grand room, which is the custom in France and Holland; instead she likes to use it to decorate many rooms in the royal apartments, and this suggests that - rather than just following the fashion - she really loves her collection.

The majority of the surviving pieces are Chinese, dating from the end of the Ming and beginning of the Qing dynasties, in the 17th century. They are decorated with types of subject – human figures, real and mythical animals, and flower and fruit compositions, and they demonstrate Mary’s excellent taste. Her collection is remarkable, and attracts many compliments. But after her death, in 1694, William, grief-stricken, gives the bulk of it to his favourite van Keppel, the Earl of Albemarle, and it goes out of the country. Perhaps he does not wish to be reminded of his loss.

## Stop 11 Little Bedchamber

### Narrator

This room is called the little bedroom, for obvious reasons. Everything is on a smaller, more intimate scale. Here at last we are officially in the King’s truly private rooms. But it is still the height of luxury. The painted ceiling is once again by Verrio, and has another bed-time theme; here Mars, the God of War, lies snoozing in the arms of Venus, Goddess of Love, an appropriate allegory for the soldier William, resting after his battles.

In size we have gone from palatial to domestic; this is a private place for the King and his closest companions. Because William shuns the public spaces, this kind of intimate access becomes more and more important. The way to the king is now not through the rooms we have just traversed, but by the back-stairs that lead into the most private apartments. If you have a weighty and delicate matter that you wish to discuss with the king, you need to negotiate with his closest friends, who guard the back-stairs, and control access to the monarch. We’ll see these stairs in a moment, so let’s move on into the next room.

## Stop 12 King’s Closet

### Narrator

This is William’s study – the King’s closet, as it’s called, and if you don’t find him in the public rooms, or even in his bedroom, you will certainly find him here, because William is nothing if not hard-working, and spends long hours at this very desk, drafting his correspondence. The door in the far corner leads to the Queen’s apartments; she has her own suite of rooms which mirror the ones we are looking at, although sadly she will die before they are completed.

We can’t stay long in here – the room is small, and anyway we are distracting his majesty, who is chewing his pen and coughing, and wondering how to squeeze more money out of Parliament for his campaigns against the French.

Move on now, and you will find yourself at the top of the stairs – the all important back-stairs. To your left is an alcove which houses the king’s necessary office, as it is called, and which contains a nice comfortable-looking toilet, with a red padded-velvet seat. But move on now, down the stairs, and on, into the red room at the bottom.

## Stop 13 Chatsworth Room

### Narrator

Now we have arrived on the ground floor, we are firmly in the king’s own world – his private apartments. Notice the low ceilings – very different from the spacious grandeur upstairs.

The objects in this room all relate to William and Mary’s time at the palace, but our tour continues in the next room, so when you’ve looked around here as much as you like, move on next door.

## Stop 14 East Closet

### Narrator

This is the first of the small closets that make up part of the King’s private apartments. All three are richly panelled in oak, and as you can see, here he might relax with a friend over a game of draughts, resting for a while from his struggle with the affairs of state.

You may have noticed that most of the paintings here are hung on ropes. It’s a clever device – which allows the King to re-hang them whenever the fancy takes him. They’re all pictures he particularly likes and give us a good idea of his taste.

William is a very private man. He has few social graces, and has gained a reputation for being cold and distant, particularly here in England, which is not his own country, and where the ins and outs of the political system are sometimes beyond him. On the battlefield he is a different man – bursting with energy and courage. Mary, on the other hand, is generally acknowledged to be warm, outgoing, attractive, modest and sweet-tempered. Although Mary will never give William any children, their marriage appears to have been successful and happy, We know for a fact that William was broken-hearted when Mary died, from small-pox, in 1694.

Let’s move on into the next room.

## Stop 15 Middle Closet

### Narrator

This room is hung with pictures, again of William’s own choosing. If you look about you can see that several of them seem to be night scenes, and in particular, beside the window, is a painting by the Flemish artist, Steinwich. Here’s Desmond Shawe-Taylor from the Royal Collection, on William’s tastes

Shawe-Taylor : These rooms are not arranged like an art gallery and nor were cabinet rooms of Princes of this date; this is not how things were done. Smaller paintings were gathered together because of their beauty or preciousness, so here you see paintings from all over Europe, without much system employed in their arrangement. What you get instead, I think, is just a quite a subtle feeling for themes, so there’s a very beautiful Night theme going on in this room.

You can see William quite cleverly sort of pulling together some candlelit scenes of Gerritt Dauw, and hanging them around this amazing centrepiece of the Steinwich, the Flemish artist, his liberation of Saint Peter, this astonishing, empty, black painting in which at first you just think there’s nothing there and then you peer into it and you see this extraordinarily, eerie, spooky, dark prison, in which Saint Peter is held and from which he will soon be liberated by an angel, that comes like a shining light to guide him out, so it’s a very kind of dramatic, night narrative, it’s not just a night scene, it’s the heroic narrative.

### Narrator

Look at the elaborate brass locks on the doors. They are by a Master locksmith appropriately named Josiah Key. If you look closely you can see that they have been beautifully decorated with elaborate royal ciphers. You may also note that these locks are all on the inside. This arrangement, and the theme of the pictures, suggests that this room is actually where the king sleeps, on a camp-bed that has more in common with the hardships of campaigning than the luxury of the Great Bedroom upstairs.

Let’s move on again, into the next room.

## Stop 16 West Closet

### Narrator

This is another of the private closets in which William can relax and entertain his close companions. It’s likely that this room was used for music. . If you look closely at the delicate carvings above the fireplace, you’ll see that, intertwined with swags of flowers, there are musical instruments. Amongst the close male companions William entertains in these rooms he has particular favourites. His first and closest, Bentinck, has been his friend since William was a teenager in Holland; indeed, when he contracted small-pox in his early twenties Bentinck, at great personal risk, nursed him through it. But in England William has found another favourite, a strikingly handsome but rather effeminate youth called van Keppel. Van Keppel has been given an enormous suite of rooms here on the ground-floor of the palace, and even more on the second floor. Bentinck is so jealous of the new favourite that he has retired in a huff to his large estates, and refuses to be reconciled with the king, until William is actually on his deathbed. All this leaves the king open to certain slanders about his sexuality, but whether this is just idle gossip, or whether there is anything to it, is hard to say.

So let’s move on again, into the next room.

## Stop 17 Orangery

### Narrator

We’re now in the Orangery. Here William’s orange and bay trees are stored during the winter months. The Prince of Orange, of course, must have the appropriate fruit-tree on display.

From here we can see the garden, which is an important part of William and Mary’s transformation of the palace. This garden has been restored to the designs created for William.

As you can see, the garden itself is very formal. It is intended for the royal couples’ private enjoyment, and kept securely locked otherwise. William might walk about here quite alone, or with just one or two specially invited companions. The queen and her ladies might sit under the bower that you can see to the right, sewing and chatting comfortably in the shade.

Look right down the garden to the wrought iron screen at the end. This wonderfully flamboyant work is by Jean Tijou, the same craftsman who made the banisters on the staircase.

Before falling out with the King, William’s favourite Bentinck is superintendent of the gardens, with the power ‘to oversee and direct any plantations and works therein’. Bentinck is a great gardener, and has also helped the royal couple create their gardens at a palace called Het Loo, in the Netherlands.

In 1986 a fire broke out that badly damaged this part of the palace.

## Stop 17a Hampton Court Fire

Boulding: Male witness and Stradwick: Male witness

### Boulding

I arrived at Trophy Gate to see this awful site of flames really oh - bright orange flames and smoke.

### Stradwick

I came along into Fountain Court where I saw the top of the Palace on the south side, where Fountain Court is, completely alight along the top, first windows and that was really raging and I thought ‘Uh-oh, we’ve got a problem’.

### Boulding:

There were fire engines and hoses and things everywhere and I could see a big portion of the Palace well alight and it was very upsetting.

### Stradwick

Now the idea was to take the room that was the most at risk, to work from that, to work out. So we opened all the shutters up so we could get to see because by this time there was quite a lot of smoke damage, you know, smoke pouring in so we opened all the windows to get us some more fresh air; and then we started to take the paintings off the wall.

We cleared all the important stuff first; that’s the paintings, and then all the ceramics, all off the shelves, all packed, out. And that went on most of the morning.

Boulding: The Orangery that overlooks the Privy Garden, that was damaged by the fire. I can vividly remember seeing charred timbers stacked up, scattered all over this area – piles of ash and debris. The thing that was interesting, that really came out of the fire, is the view that you now get from the Orangery. The Privy Garden was rather overgrown with mature trees and shrubs and things, and standing on the Orangery Terrace, you would barely see the pool that’s in the centre of the Privy Garden, let alone anything beyond that, but it was the fire and the damage that was caused to that, that really was the catalyst to restoring the Privy Garden, because with the interior of the apartments repaired and restored to the way they were at that time when King William was here, it was felt that the garden should be too.

### Narrator

Move on into the next room now.

## Stop 18 Private Drawing Room

### Narrator

William’s Private Drawing Room is a testament to his rich and varied intellectual life. He is an intelligent monarch, well read, and interested in the ideas of the day.

On the wall to the right hangs his barometer, and behind the desk are two bookcases. His account books show regular payments to his bookseller, for works on history, travel and religion, and on subjects as diverse as ‘Wars of the Greeks and Romans’ and ‘The Natural History of Oxfordshire’. William is often accused of being distant, abstracted, and inaccessible, and it is true that he sometimes likes to shut himself away with a book. When confined to bed, his doctor once found him reading an English translation of Aesop’s Fables.

But since the death of Mary, William’s health, and his orderly life-style, have begun to deteriorate. He still goes hunting – that is as ever his favourite pastime - but his hand-writing is now a shaky scrawl, and he writes few letters in person.

Let’s move on now, into the next room.

## Stop 19 Private Dining Room

### Narrator

This room was fitted out as William’s private dining room in seventeen hundred, towards the end of his life. The key architectural feature of this room is the alcove at the far end, in which is a marble-topped table designed for a display of gold plate. Wine could be served from this alcove, and dirty plates removed to it, then after dinner the shutter would be dropped, leaving the king and his companions in complete privacy. At this time William is increasingly dining with only a few close friends, and he has got into the habit of massive over-indulgence, in both food and drink. He is not happy in England, and although he is not yet fifty, contemporaries describe him as physically worn out, more like a man twenty years older, with grotesquely swollen legs. He is discontented, depressed and ill, and his popularity is at an all time low. Mary was far closer to the hearts of her countrymen, and with her death a great deal of support has been lost. And because she and William have failed to produce an heir, Mary’s sister Anne, is now certain to inherit the throne. Anne loathes William and calls him the ‘Dutch abortion’. All in all it’s not a happy end to his reign.

William has moved in here the series of pictures known as the ‘Hampton Court Beauties’, portraits of female courtiers, such as Mary’s ladies in waiting, commissioned from Sir Godfrey Kneller, including Diana de Vere, duchess of St Albans, and Margaret Cecil, Countess of Ranelagh.

## Stop 19a The Hampton Court Beauties

### Narrator

Here’s Desmond Shawe-Taylor from the Royal Collection:

### Shawe-Taylor

To really appreciate these paintings, you have to think of them in relation to the last great series of Court beauties, which were painted by Sir Peter Leyly for the ladies in waiting of the Court of Charles II and which can be seen in the Georgian Rooms, here at Hampton Court. One of the characteristics of the Windsor Beauties is that they’re basically very sexy; it’s the beauty that’s being accentuated and it’s beauty of a very erotic kind. When Queen Mary commissioned a series of Hampton Court beauties surrounding the Court of William, I think people would’ve expected something which would have emulated that erotic effect, but what Kneller does, I’m sure at the Queen’s instruction, is to produce something completely different. Where Leyly’s court beauties are primarily erotic Kneller’s beauties are much graver, more serious and more dignified as befits the much more serious, not exactly repressive, but much more chaste court of William and Mary. We might say now and this is part of a fundamental shift which occurs in the attitude to women during the early years of the 18th Century, put simply, everybody becomes much more prudish and much less permissive.

### Narrator

Our tour is nearly at an end now. Let’s leave the dining room and move on through the next room and into the corridor on your left.

## Stop 20 William III's Death

### Narrator

At the beginning of 1702 William decides to try a new horse in the park. He is urging the horse to a gallop when suddenly it falls to its knees, and William is thrown. The horse had stumbled on a mole-hill. William has broken his collar-bone, and his ailing health cannot cope with the strain of this injury. Two weeks later he is dead, and his enemies are drinking toasts to the ‘little gentleman in black velvet’ – the mole who has brought him down.

With William’s death, the whole system of the court as we have seen it in action today is on the wane. Persons of good quality will no longer be allowed to wander into the palace and set eyes on, or even chat with their sovereign. William’s obsession with business and his lack of social grace have helped to put paid to this system. The court is no longer the focus of fashion and society. The aristocracy will take their pleasures elsewhere, in their own great houses, and the political classes will gather in the coffee houses and clubs. The royal retreat from public life has begun.

Our tour is at an end now, so find your way out into Clock Court.

## [End of Tour]