



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

KENSINGTON PALACE

**UNTOLD  
LIVES:  
A PALACE  
AT WORK**

**RESOURCE 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

For hundreds of years, Kensington Palace has been a working royal palace. Throughout, servants in many different roles have worked in close, sometimes personal, proximity to monarchs and their families. These working people were at the centre of the function and culture of the palace but their stories are little understood and rarely represented. *Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* addresses this omission, revealing new research which tells the stories of the labour, experiences and expertise of the men, women and children who lived and worked at Kensington Palace.

Using objects, artwork, stories and personal accounts, this exhibition is an exciting opportunity to explore the lives of Kensington Palace's diverse workforce – from wetnurses and seamstresses to pages, cooks, 'ratcatchers' and many more – for the very first time. However, these explorations also touch on themes which visitors may find challenging, such as enslavement, racism, sexuality and class. This guide has been designed to support teachers and community 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

*Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* will take place in the Pigott Gallery at Kensington Palace from 14 March to 27 October 2024. 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 online [CAS Group Visit Request Form](#).

**Community Access Scheme ‘Free Visit’ 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.**

### GETTING TO THE PALACE

#### COACH PARKING

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.

#### 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.

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. Please encourage your students and group members to ‘pack light’, only bringing what is necessary.

We 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.

## ACCESSIBILITY

*Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* 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 via the Princess Court Arcade lift; please ask a member of staff in red uniform should you require lift 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.

## POTENTIAL SENSORY TRIGGERS

*Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* is designed to present previously unseen objects in compelling ways.

The exhibition includes sensory elements which may cause disorientation:

- There is sound and music throughout the exhibition.
- There is dramatic lighting, with darkness and spotlights.
- There are projections and films.

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

## POTENTIAL CONTENT TRIGGERS

*Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* includes objects and stories that may evoke themes such as servitude and enslavement, racism, sexuality and class. Front of House staff have received training to develop awareness, skills, language and resources 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 **Untold Lives: A Palace at Work Content Guide** sections below for further information on these themes.

## 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.

*Untold Lives: A Palace at Work* will attempt to explore and answer important questions such as:

- Who lived and worked in the palace?
- What kinds of work did palace servants do?
- What skill and care did their work involve?
- How did their work bring them close to the royals and how did they feel about this?
- How did their work shape their identity and how did their identity shape the palace?

The visitor will experience these questions through objects, artworks, stories and personal accounts, exploring how working people were represented at the time and have been remembered today. General information about the period the exhibition explores along with suggested questions to get your group thinking or researching ahead of their visit are below.

### WHAT TIME PERIOD DOES THE EXHIBITION EXPLORE?

The exhibition looks predominantly at the eighteenth-century (1700s) when the Georgian royalty made their homes at Kensington Palace, Kew Palace and Hampton Court Palace. There are also parallels drawn with contemporary life and work in the palaces.

Royal palaces during the Georgian period served a dual purpose. They were home to the royal family, places for monarchs and their children to be born, grow, study, work and live. Palaces also hosted the royal ‘court’, which referred to the social aspect of the monarchy, such as visits from important dignitaries and public audiences with the royal family.

- What do you know about the Georgian era (c1700s)?
- What types of houses would people have lived in?
- What sort of transport would they have used?
- What depictions of ‘going to court’ have you seen?

### WHAT DID SERVANTS DO?

Palaces required a huge presence of servants to serve the court and household during this period, ranging from physical roles such as the ‘Keeper of the Ice and Snow’ (responsible for cutting ice from nearby water sources to keep palace food and drink cool) to more intimate ones, such as the ‘Groom of the Stool’ who accompanied the King when he went ‘to make water’. Servants could be expected to be at the beck and call of the royal family; life could be challenging, with little time off and high expectations.

- What are some roles you think servants performed in the palace?
- Imagine a day in the life of a servant at the Georgian court.
- How do you think you would spend your day or night?
- Where would you sleep?
- What would you eat?

### WHERE DID PALACE WORKERS COME FROM?

In the late 1600s and throughout the 1700s, palace servants were mostly white working people from Britain and Ireland. However, the arrival of William III and Mary II from the Netherlands and George I from Hanover brought workers from across the globe, making the household more international than we might imagine. The expansion of colonialism also brought workers from abroad, with some coming from across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Servants included dukes and duchesses with high status and intimate access to the monarchy, through to lower social classes, including those who may have been enslaved or subject to forced migration. Some workers were paid, and others were not. The royal court and palace servants thus represented a wide range of diverse cultures, perspectives and statuses, shaped by nationality, religion and ethnicity.

- Are you surprised that servants sometimes came from around the world?
- How do you think the mixing of cultures, nationalities, religions and statuses would have impacted on work at the palaces?
- How do you think servants felt about serving monarchs?
- Would this be different for those from Britain and those from abroad, or for those being paid or not paid?

# UNTOLD LIVES: A PALACE AT WORK CONTENT 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:



© Historic Royal Palaces

## A PALACE AT WORK

In the 1700s the royal household was staggeringly vast. At the top were dukes and duchesses serving in intimate roles for honour and influence. Beneath them, over one thousand men, women and children worked in a complex web of departments, from groom to page, physician to footman, cook to rat killer, down to the 'necessary women' who emptied the chamber pots. These servants formed the 'below-stairs' household, a disciplined army of skilled workers who made the palaces tick.

## ORIGINS AND IDENTITIES

These workers were not famous or powerful. Most came from England, but some came from across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Upon becoming monarch and travelling to England from his home in Hanover (Germany), George I brought two body-servants from the Ottoman-governed part of what is now Greece. These two workers, as well as a page boy and a musician, are depicted in the life-size portraits that adorn the King's Staircase and reflect the presence of people from Africa and the Caribbean who also served the court. While some workers were paid, some had been enslaved.



© Ömer Koç collection

Ernst August Mustapha von Misitir, known as Mustapha, was a Turkish valet who accompanied King George I when he took up the British throne in 1714. Originally captured by George's Hanoverian armies during battle against the Ottoman Empire, Mustapha was a trusted, paid servant of George I, carrying out intimate tasks such as dressing the King. This high status sparked jealousy from British noblemen, often fuelling prejudice and rumours. Depicted for perpetuity in the artwork on the King's Staircase at Kensington Palace, Untold Lives shares an intimate view of Mustapha during his time at the Georgian court through a portrait by Godfrey Kneller which is being exhibited in the UK for the very first time.

## SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

Palace life required a wide range of skills and expertise to keep the court running smoothly. From cleaning to storing ice, lamp-lighting, embroidering, killing rats or growing pineapples, a job at court was highly desirable. For some, opportunities for accommodation, promotion, travel, food and security were excellent. Roles and skills were handed down from father and mother to daughter and son. Family trades developed, sometimes over many generations.

## STATUS

The palace lived and breathed hierarchy. From the kitchen boy to the Lord Chamberlain, every royal servant was acutely conscious of status and rank. Golden pass keys unlocked the royal family's private doors. Worn prominently at the hip of the household elite, gold keys were status symbols – in life and in portraits. Portraits give us a vivid sense of status, but most people's faces and names are not recorded. Some are lost because they fell from favour; others are lost once living memory dies.

*'Shame: The Sad and Melancholy Tale of Gustavus Gwydickens'*: Gwydickens was a Gentleman in the court of Queen Charlotte from 1783. He was accused of having sex with a younger man in Hyde Park near Kensington Palace. Though the offence never came to trial, Gwydickens was disgraced and he died in debtors' prison. The story of Gwydickens is brought to life in Untold Lives through a visual art commission by artist Matt Smith.



© Royal Collection Trust /  
© His Majesty King Charles III 2024

The ratcatcher or rat-killer was an important role in the royal household, keeping the rat population under control and in turn preventing the spread of disease and damage or contamination of food supplies. The ratcatcher's unique, embroidered uniform featuring rats shows the significance of this role in keeping the palace running.

## CARE AND INTIMACY

At the heart of the household were the servants who tended to the family in personal and caring roles. For these trusted servants, absolute loyalty and discretion were exchanged for access to the private lives of kings and queens. A large number of servants were involved in the care of the royal family. For example, Queen Charlotte's babies were cared for by four nurses, three cradle rockers, two nursery maids and a necessary woman.

## LEGACIES OF UNTOLD LIVES

The legacies of thousands of palace workers are represented in the exhibition by a few surviving objects. There are physical mementos made of hair, cloth, silver or paper. Some are very personal, gifted to favoured servants who treasured them for decades as reminders of their time inside the royal household. However, for most palace workers, the legacy of their time here is invisibility. Their contribution to the public spectacle of monarchy remains in the shadows.

There are far-reaching cultural and political legacies from a century when kings and queens invested their wealth in the trade in enslaved African people. These are legacies of global injustice that we are still researching and coming to terms with today.



## AFTER YOUR VISIT

We hope you enjoyed your visit to *Untold Lives: A Palace at Work*. Below are some extension questions and activities to do with your group or independently.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What palace role was the most surprising to you? Were there any jobs that you wouldn't mind having a go at?
- Many people worked their whole lives in the palace, and some roles were passed down within families. Do you think the idea of having a 'life's work' is changing? Are there other ways you think the nature of work has changed or stayed the same over the past 300 years?
- Some of the objects on display were gifts. How might the people who received gifts from the monarchs they served felt?
- We still don't know much about the majority of people who worked in the palaces, due to lack of records or falling out of favour. How do you feel about this 'invisibility'? Is this similar or different to today's world of work? Is this influenced by other factors, such as the internet?

## THINGS TO DO

### Migration Museum

The Migration Museum explores how the movement of people to and from the UK across the ages has made us who we are – as individuals and as nations.

[www.migrationmuseum.org](http://www.migrationmuseum.org)

### Foundling Museum

Established by Royal Charter of King George II in 1739, the Foundling Museum in Bloomsbury explores the work of Thomas Coram to care for babies at risk of abandonment due to extreme poverty, pollution and disease prevalent in London during this time.

[www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk)

### Serving Victoria: Life in the Royal Household by Kate Hubbard

Read about the life and work of six servants who played a key role in the reign of Queen Victoria, as elucidated by correspondence from ladies-in-waiting, maids of honour, personal physicians and more.

## 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](mailto:kensingtonlearning@hrp.org.uk)

For community visits, please contact: [communities@hrp.org.uk](mailto:communities@hrp.org.uk)



