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THE RESTORATION OF HAMPTON COURT

Hampton Court is England's largest royal palace. It was begun in the early 16th century by King Henry VIII and remained one of the principal royal residences from 1529 until 1760. After 1760, it was abandoned by the court and in 1838 was opened to the public by Queen Victoria. The building we see today is half the 16th century residence of the Tudors and Stuarts and half the baroque palace of William III built between 1689 and 1702. The palace contains some of the finest paintings, tapestries and furniture in the Royal Collection and is set in the most important baroque landscape in the country.

But until 1989 the management of the contents, the buildings, the gardens and the tourist activities were separated. The contents, including the royal collection of Renaissance paintings, were under the control of the Queen's Surveyor of Pictures who arranged the palace as a great art gallery. The buildings and gardens were maintained well, but perhaps over-restored by two separate government departments. Finally the business of opening the palace to the public was undertaken by a fourth department which had no control over the other three and little interest in improving the quality of what the visitors saw.

Meanwhile visitor numbers were declining. There was an average fall of two percent a year over the period 1970 to 1990, mainly for two reasons. First, since the 1970s in England, heavy competition had built up for historic buildings, as more theme parks, zoos, gardens and other amusements opened every year. These new attractions directly compete with buildings like Hampton Court for it is the same sort of people who visit both. But Hampton Court's decline is due to more than competition. The palace itself had become a less attractive place to visit. The split in responsibilities meant that no-one had an overriding interest in making the palace a beautiful, interesting and enjoyable place to see.

In 1986, there was a terrible fire in the King's Apartments on the south side of the palace. This disaster led, almost directly, to the setting up of a government agency to run the unoccupied royal palaces including Hampton Court, Kensington State Apartments, HM Tower of London, Banqueting House, Whitehall, Kew Palace and Queen Charlotte's Cottage. A Chief Executive was to have overall control of all aspects of the building and he was able to appoint, for the first time, a Surveyor of the Fabric, a Commercial Director and a Curator.

The new agency had almost complete financial freedom. It was required to progressively reduce the amount of mon-

ey it received from the State by increasing its commercial income, that is to say, money raised from admissions, shops, catering and special events. But any extra money made could be spent as the Agency thought best.

Since 1989, the annual income has increased over all the five palaces in the Agency by 68% to £ 21 million a year. And this, importantly, has meant that it has been possible to spend about £ 21 million on schemes to improve and conserve the palaces over the last four years. At least half of this sum has been spent at Hampton Court Palace.

Spending money on Hampton Court was not merely a commercial venture, it has been driven by a philosophical mission. Up to the 1970s, the way historic buildings in England were shown to the public revolved round a narrow art-historical methodology. Guidebooks and guides concentrated on the principal dates of construction, the architects involved and the craftsmen who executed specific elements of the interior.

This approach reflected very closely the concerns of leading art and architectural historians whose focus was very much upon the development of style and form. However, during the 1970s there was a methodological change amongst architectural historians. This was represented by the publication in 1978 of 'Social Life in the English Country House' by Mark Girouard. Girouard's approach was to take the function of the building, rather than its form and to use this as a way of explaining the conception, building and evolution of a particular house.

Gradually during the late 1970s this academic approach to architectural history fused with furniture history as popularized by the Victoria & Albert Museum. The outcome was the restoration of a series of important buildings, starting with Ham House near Richmond, to a specific period in their history in order to illustrate their social history.

It is this approach which the Historic Royal Palaces Agency have sought to bring to Hampton Court. Before work started in 1990, visitors to the palace walked through over 60 rooms, filled with works of art with no explanation of how the rooms were used originally. In many cases, whole suites of rooms were visited backwards, destroying the crucial concepts of hierarchy and baroque progression. In the Queen's Apartments for instance, it seemed as if there was a bed in every room - these beds were on show wherever they could be squeezed in. Hampton Court presented itself as a museum, not as an important historic building.

One of the first initiatives the Agency undertook to help explain how the palace had originally served was to divide the tour of the palace into functional visits. That is to say,

stopping the visit being one long loop, leaving visitors confused and exhausted, but dividing the palace up into six routes: The King's and Queen's Apartments separated, the Tudor and Hanoverian rooms separated and the kitchens and picture gallery separated.

The setting up of the routes in 1991 provided an agenda for restoration. It was now possible to turn to each of them and restore them in order to explain their original usage. So far three routes have been completed, the King's Apartments, the Tudor Apartments and the kitchens.

This paper will consider the scope of these three restorations, to highlight some of the problems and techniques used and then to sum up with a few points about the way our historic buildings and interiors have been conserved and restored in England.

The largest project to date has been the restoration of the rooms damaged by fire in 1986. These are the King's Apartments built between 1689 and 1702. They were only occupied by four monarchs between 1702 and 1737 and were afterwards closed up for a hundred years until they were opened to the public in 1838. Between 1838 and the fire of 1986, they were, in common with the rest of the palace, a picture gallery. There is no point in a short paper in dwelling on the restoration of the fire damage. This has been published elsewhere in *Apollo*, Volume CXL, August 1994. Needless to say a subtle blend of historical research, advanced engineering, traditional skills and painstaking archaeology was used to make sure that the buildings were rebuilt exactly as before.

The main decisions were taken in regard to restoring the interiors. They were not to be returned to their appearance in 1986 but to the way they were when King William III occupied them in the early 18th century. This decision was deliberately taken so as to illustrate to visitors how an English baroque palace looked and functioned in the first half of the 18th century. But the decision was only taken because of three advantages. First, the rooms were (apart from fire damage) exactly as William III had left them - they had not been architecturally altered. Secondly, many of the furnishings from William's time survived in the Royal Collection and could be relocated in their original positions. Thirdly, the English royal palaces are magnificently documented. All the original furnishing accounts and bills survived and these told us much of what was needed to know about the original interiors. So it was possible by using a mixture of archaeology, precedent and documentation, the rooms were restored to their appearance in 1700.

In restoring the King's Apartments, the choice of what to do was a straightforward one. The rooms had only ever had one decorative scheme and had been used for only one purpose. The surviving Tudor rooms had had a much more chequered history. To begin with, only four rooms remained from the original Tudor scheme, the rest had been demolished in the 18th century. The surviving rooms had then been used for a variety of purposes, everything from a theatre to an office. In the early 19th century, the rooms had been partially restored to a 16th century appearance but much of this was, in its turn, swept away in the early 20th century when the rooms were converted into a gallery for the display of tapestries. So, there was no easy choice.

It was decided that any decisions would be made on the basis of archaeological investigation. This involved a mi-

nute examination of the building. We took plaster off to reveal blocked doors and fireplaces, panelling off to reveal the original form of windows and to uncover large areas of undisturbed 16th century plaster. All this was meticulously drawn and measured and then analysed to ascertain what might be possible. What quickly became clear is that too much of the 16th century work had been destroyed to recreate the rooms of Henry VIII which was our original intention. Instead, we had to rebuild and rearrange the 18th century work to give the rooms some coherence. In the end, three rooms were completed: the Great Watching Chamber, a gallery and a small room used as a Pages' Chamber.

But to do this involved much new work being introduced. The Page's Chamber, for instance, although it has its original plaster and windows has a completely new fireplace, carefully reproduced from surviving fragments and examples elsewhere in the palace. On one level, there is a fireplace, without which the room would have made little sense, on another level something new has been introduced and passed off as old because visitors expect the palace to be old and not a modern reproduction. We will return to these questions of authenticity later.

The third route restored at the palace is the 16th century kitchens. The original kitchens were enormous, over 60 rooms covering over 20,000 square metres, but after about 1660 they began to fall out of use and gradually most of the rooms were converted to residences until only one small area remained recognizable as a kitchen. In 1978 much work was undertaken to clear out some of the residences and open up the great kitchen but this resulted in an empty series of rooms, interesting from an archaeological and architectural point of view but not giving any feeling for this purpose or how they functioned. In 1990 it was decided to show the kitchens as they were when in use in the 1540s and in order to do this we re-created a great Tudor feast, using 16th century utensils and real taxidermy and food. Dealers all over England were approached for suitable pottery and pewter and we were able to purchase a huge and high quality collection of domestic utensils. It has to be admitted that none of these items were royal, however all were of the right date to furnish the rooms.

Now it is time to turn from what has been achieved to an analysis of it. The last part of this paper highlights two areas of tension or contradiction which are faced in this programme. The first is the tension between commercialization and conservation, the second between authenticity and the didactic approach.

This paper began with a description of how the Agency is funded and described some of the things that financial success has enabled to achieve. But as well as completing the restorations themselves a strong curatorial and conservation infrastructure has been built up. To achieve the projects described above 28 textile conservators, 4 archaeologists, 2 scientists, 4 curators and 6 housekeepers have been employed. All these posts and their equipment are also funded by the commercial income.

But that commercial income can jeopardize the very thing the Agency was set up to preserve - the buildings and their interiors and collections. At Hampton Court, for instance, to keep the commercial income up there are now two massive international events; an international flower show which

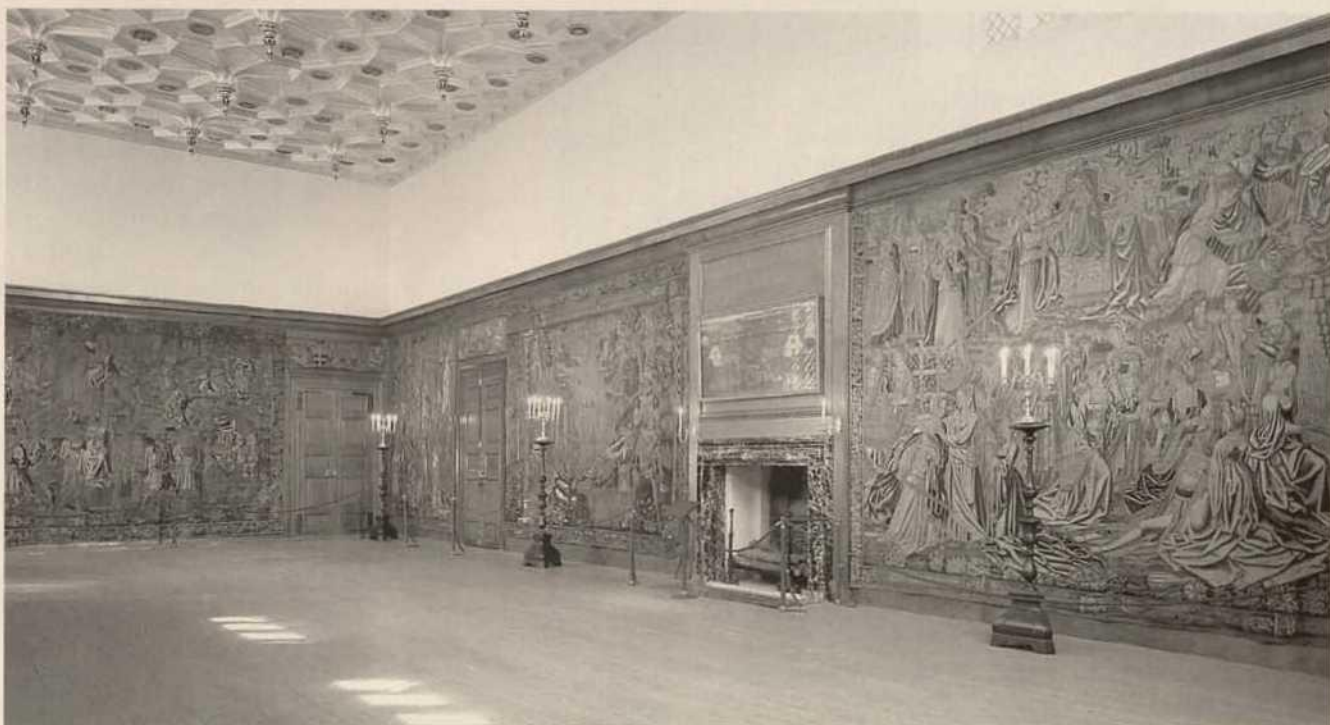
generates about £ 500,000 and a music festival which brings in about £ 200,000. In addition, there are dinners and events in the State Apartments which generate a further £ 100,000 a year.

The flower show is held in the park but the festival and other events in the palace make a serious impact on the building: spilt water and food, careless flower arranging, damaged floors. However much one tries, these things will happen and the palace will get damaged. The Agency is faced with the question "is it worth it?" Is a continual low level of damage to the palace, which over a long period will cause serious conservation problems, accepted or do we refuse £ 3-400,000 per annum which directly funds the conservation and restoration projects? There is no easy answer.

The second contradiction is the tension between authenticity and the didactic approach. This tension arises prima-

shot in time but in reality we know that it is an intellectual construction devised by curators, historians and architects. It's almost like a film set but one made to last and one dressed with priceless works of art. This need not be a problem. There are three important points which justify the whole business of historic reconstruction.

First, it is the best way of helping visitors understand the way the building was originally used, the authenticity of function is more approachable for ordinary people than ruthless authenticity of form. Secondly, it can be done to a very high standard both in terms of scholarly approach and in terms of the use of materials. What is shown may not be "authentic" but every effort has been made to get as close as possible. Third, those who undertake these reconstructions have to be aware that all they can do is to bring a late 20th century interpretation of the past to their audience.



Hampton Court Palace, Great Watching Chamber

rily out of the Agency's desire to show the interiors as they were so that visitors can understand how they were used. But what happens when there is a bedroom with no bed, a throne room with no throne, a Pages' Chamber, as described above, with no fireplace? These elements are essential if visitors are to understand the room's function.

The whole question of reproductions and authenticity is central to the approach. The use of reproductions assumes that the overall impression of any particular room is more important than the quality and authenticity of the individual items in it. Colleagues in museums in England sometimes find this difficult to face but more importantly, what are the visitors seeing?

They are walking through rooms partly original and partly reconstructed with much genuine furniture, all the paintings and tapestries but several items of reproduced furniture. Each of the routes at Hampton Court poses as a snap-

Just as curators shouldn't fool their visitors, they shouldn't fool themselves. Curators must understand that in thirty years time, people will be saying "Oh, that looks so 1990s!"

Finally, how does one judge success? Above it was pointed out that the Agency's mission was to explain Hampton Court to people as a unified whole, contents, building and social life. I think success can be measured by a single set of statistics.

In 1988 the average time a visitor spent at Hampton Court Palace was 1 hour 30 minutes. Five years later, the average time is 3 hours. Slightly fewer rooms are open today than five years ago and visitors are spending twice the time in the palace. Despite possible economical and philosophical problems with the approach, it has made Hampton Court more accessible, beautiful, understandable and enjoyable to the 600,000 visitors who come from all over the world every year.