

Palaces of Variety



There's no doubting that the Royal family help boost our tourist revenue, but how can their Old World image be reconciled with the very modern techniques of 21st century attractions? It's a problem which particularly faces the curators of Historic Royal Palaces. The organisation's head of PR, Jacqueline Gazzard, explains how they manage it.

'Are they real?' and 'How much are they worth?' – the two most commonly asked questions at the Tower of London. To what are people referring? Of course, the answer is the Crown Jewels. The royal jewels are the single most popular reason for visiting this ancient fortress. Running a close second and third we have the 'Beefeaters' (pictured right), members of the traditional bodyguard, and the ravens, without whom the Tower and Kingdom are supposed to crumble. All are very real parts of what we might term our 'Royal' heritage.

The Tower of London is part of Historic Royal Palaces, a charitable trust responsible for the care, management and presentation of the unoccupied royal palaces. But the Tower is clearly rather more than this in the imagination and experience of many millions of people around the world. It is a British icon, a 'must see' site on the traveller's list and at the heart of our national history and identity.

Likewise, Hampton Court Palace, another of 'our' sites, will forever be associated with Henry VIII. Visitors come from all over the globe to see his home and enjoy the splendours of



this famous monarch. Clearly, Henry Tudor was a Royal who also managed to place himself and his realm importantly in the mindset of sixteenth century world politics – despite the relative modesty of his kingdom.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency was created in 1989 to manage these, the unoccupied royal palaces. In April 1998 all the activities of the agency were transferred to a Royal Charter Body with charitable status. We are contracted by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to manage the palaces on his behalf. The responsibility extends across five sites: HM Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace State Apartments (pictured above), the Banqueting House at Whitehall and Kew Palace with Queen Charlotte's Cottage. As a charity we receive no funding from the taxpayer and are thus entirely dependent on the income from visitors. A great deal of emphasis must be placed on making

the visit as enjoyable and inspiring as possible.

It is precisely because of our strong royal connections that heritage continues to be such a draw to millions: Certainly it is a very large part of the attraction to visitors to our sites - who come to experience the imprint of the monarchs who lived out their extraordinary lives within the walls of the palaces in our care. Whether you're a loyal royalist or not, one thing is undeniable, the relics of our royal past lie at the heart of our modern existence, underpinning our economic welfare in a number of ways. Tourism brings in an annual income to the United Kingdom of some £10 billion. It is quite simply a huge money spinner and the noticeable difference between ourselves and any other tourist hot spot can usually be pinned on an ancestor of Her Majesty The Queen. The Kings and Queens who have governed have left their imprint on many aspects of the design of our country and its national heritage. They have certainly left their marks on the palaces.

From William the Conqueror marching on London and creating the first White Tower, to the Medieval monarchs who further enhanced its fortifications; the Tudors and Stuarts who built and enhanced Hampton Court, the Banqueting House and then Kensington, to the Georgian changes at Hampton Court and Kew. Finally the Victorian influence on Kensington and the Tower. Each period added layers of history, influence and intrigue. Each left a stamp on the Palace in question and this in turn creates interesting passages of history for the modern day interpreter to follow and thus create new reasons for visitors to continue to explore British history.

There is no doubt that the fascination with our royal family is



Above: Hampton Court Palace

Below: The Orangery at Kensington Palace

there to begin with, but how do we harness it for continued public enjoyment and education? As early as the nineteenth century people could slip a Yeoman Warder a few pennies for an escorted look around the inside of the Tower of London. Things become more regulated during the Victorian period, when Hampton Court and Kensington Palace were opened to the public for the first time and the Duke of Wellington gave the Beefeaters a uniform. Now the palaces welcome around three million visitors each year. They all enjoy a variety of



entertainment which takes its theme from those who have contributed to the lives of these buildings. They represent more than a thousand years of social, architectural and political history and we show this with maps, routes, audio and visual guides.

Ironically, it was probably the fire at Hampton Court in 1986 which first caused people to re-think the presentation of this and the other unoccupied sites.

Although people could (and did) visit the places, they were really little more than dusty rooms with a little furniture. As you wandered through the King's State Apartments at Hampton Court there was little to explain how they came to look the way they did and indeed what their different and individual functions might once have been. The fire forced a very real look at how those apartments had once worked - with curators discovering original receipts and information on every detail of a room's original creation, down to the type of material and lengths of fabric required for each curtain drop.

As conservators sifted through debris, they were piecing together a slice of Baroque history which also provided the inkling of an idea for the re-presentation. We could show not only how the apartments were put together, but also the historical evidence for the work. We might also furnish the rooms to show how the monarch used them - where William III lived and worked and differences between his private and public rooms. Additionally, we looked to use audio and costumed human guides to help bring this story to life and fill the rooms with characters who had once worked and lived here within the court of the King.

Many were horrified at an approach which was, quite unfairly, described as 'Hey Nonny Nonny' in reference to the

idea that such guides might speak "Olde Englishe". Actually the language was quite modern and the costumes were faithfully recreated for knowledgeable guides trained both in interpretation and their chosen historical subject. It's a measure of the success of this approach that visitor enjoyment figures soared - and guides continue to delight and fascinate international audiences both at Hampton Court and the Tower of London.



Above: Kew Palace

to date we are consciously linking the monarch's working wardrobe - and the restrictions it places upon Her Majesty to this day - with court dress stretching back centuries. As costumed guides at Hampton Court or the Tower will explain, their dress follows strict rules and custom dictated for courtiers in any given period. Such customs stipulated what fabrics might be worn by everyone from the monarch down. There

The Tower is perhaps unfairly remembered as a place of doom, renowned for its grim history. For many years our visitors have yearned to see evidence of the torture carried out here. The truth is that the evidence for torture is good, but shows quite clearly it was probably carried out over a relatively short period. We have therefore anguished over a suitable way of showing this side of the history so that we might educate the public about the truth behind the myths. Furthermore, we have tried to do so in a way which doesn't glory in the unpleasant reality of the pain inflicted. Perhaps our most modern interpretation yet, the display we have recently opened comes with touch screen computer technology which explores the true stories of real characters. We show that torturers mostly hated their task, and better still that the mere sight of the instruments was usually sufficient to elicit the truth from a supposed traitor without actually having to administer any suffering.

At Kensington the layout of the Palace and needs of the assemblage merited a very different approach. The extraordinary collection of royal court and ceremonial dress covers a huge period from the 17th to 21st centuries. The exhibitions explain the complex process of 'dressing for court' - whether you were a debutant or

diplomat. We have offered a number of different types of interpretation. There is an audio guide which takes you along a route, following the preparation and presentation to the monarch. Also an eighteenth century gentleman's dress is 'exploded' within a case to show the many different layers, right down to his stockings and garters.

We explain the modern dress of the royal family with the UK's only display of dress loaned by Her Majesty The Queen. In bringing the collections up

were even restrictions on the type and quantity of fur with which a member of the court might trim their dress.

Nowadays this situation is somewhat reversed. Those working with The Queen on her wardrobe look to reflect the customs and traditions of the people Her Majesty is visiting to ensure they are respected in the dress created for Her to wear. A display of carefully created accessories - hats, scarves and handbags - is on display at Kensington Palace from the end of May and will show how this is worked out with dazzling results. Over 75 hats from the royal wardrobe are sure to delight our modern audience and show how the traditional links between heritage, royalty and tourism will always entertain and educate.



Below: The Tower of London

All images, except where marked, appear courtesy of Britain On View

Royalty and Tourism in figures

20 per cent of overseas visitors come for the "pageantry, history and ceremonial";

30 per cent intend to visit the Tower of London;

33 per cent intend to visit Buckingham Palace;

222,000 admissions to the Queen's Gallery at its pre-redevelopment peak (1995-1996);

301,000 admissions to Buckingham Palace in 1999;

699,000 admissions to Hampton Court Palace in 1999;

2,422,000 admissions to the Tower of London in 1999.

