

Friday, May 10

## Hampton Court

“Immersion in a world other than one’s own is a form of transport...” -Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*

Today, we’ll be taking the train to Hampton Court, a palace on the Thames that kings, queens, and their court used to approach via barge. Construction on the palace began in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the Lord Chancellor (highest office of the crown) to Henry VIII (yes, the dude with six wives). According to the Hampton Court’s website:



“Wolsey wanted to create a grand building where he could host not only the King and the royal court but also monarchs from across Europe. Investing huge sums of money, he created a palace fit for the King. Wolsey was so successful in his work that Henry eventually took Hampton Court for himself. By the 1530s, Henry VIII's Hampton Court was a palace, a hotel, a theatre and a vast leisure complex. The King used it to demonstrate magnificence and power in every possible way, through lavish banquets, extravagant court life and fabulously expensive art. In addition to Henry’s state and private apartments, where he slept, ate and relaxed, and the queen’s private apartments, the palace contained accommodation for courtiers. The style depended on the status of the occupant, but again, were intended to impress.”

Subsequent monarchs added to the palace. When William and Mary ruled (1689-1702) they hired Sir Christopher Wren, famed architect who designed St. Paul’s Cathedral and helped redesign London after the Great Fire in 1666, to build a new wing in the Baroque style.

Visitors have been touring Hampton Court since it was opened to the public by Queen Victoria in 1838.

Once we arrive, we will each receive an audio guide (they will have headsets, but you’ll be more comfortable with your own, likely). In addition to the regular guide, Hampton Court has produced a “star-studded [film and television location tour](#).” Who are the stars? We’ll see...



Also, if you are particularly interested in gardens, here’s a [podcast](#) produced by the Historical Royal Palaces Trust that interviews the current gardener.



While we are here, you are free to roam at your own pace; explore every room or garden; if it's a nice day and you want to sit under a tree by the Thames, be our guest. But listen to the audio guide and think about how the voices you are hearing have been staged to shape what you see and how you see it.

Consider:

- What are the stories being told about this place?
- Who are the characters who populate these stories? You are present in the space while they are absent, so how does the guide attempt to “resurrect” these ghosts?
- Hampton Court used to hire performers who guides tours in period costume. How would that experience have been different? Do you miss them now that you know about them? Or are you relieved that they were replaced by the “stars” producing the audio commentary?
- Have you seen any of the films or television shows referenced by the audio guide? Is it easier to imagine these characters in these spaces? Or to imagine the actors here working on set?
- How do we look at the palace differently when we see it as the backdrop for history OR as the backdrop for a fictional story like *Bridgerton*?
- What does the restoration and upkeep of a palace this size say about this country’s dedication to preserving its heritage? What does Hampton Court say about Britain as a nation?

**#UKinMay assignment:**

1. Take, caption, and post a couple of pictures of your experience of Hampton Court as a backdrop for history and/or the backdrop of fictional stories. Feel free to use one another as props to make your point. :-)
2. Take, caption, and post a picture of something anachronistic in this historic space, the intrusion of today into a stage setting of the past.