

Hampton Court

Information dated 2012, from www.accessinlondon.org
For a summary of the abbreviations used see under *Methodology*

Hampton Court Palace and Gardens

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A magnificent riverside Tudor palace with more than 20ha (50 acres) of formal gardens, surrounded by extensive wooded parklands in Hampton Court Park and Bushy Park.

There's a lot to see !

Substantial admission charge to the Palace, to the Maze, and in the summer, to the Gardens.

The website has quite good downloadable plans both of the Palace itself and of the Gardens. Printed copies can be picked up at the ticket office and Welcome Centre near the entrance or in the Undercroft where the audio guides are distributed.

There's an extensive *Access guide* on the website.

This starts by saying "*Hampton Court is very large ! Visitors wishing to see all of the interiors, and a part of the gardens will travel over 3km*" and it's very refreshing to find such an accurate introduction to a description of 'access'.

Unfortunately, the website information after that is somewhat too detailed and fragmented, with six downloadable pdfs. They have been put together by local Access Forum who know the place well and have obviously worked for years to improve access, and have done a good job in many respects. In our view the pdfs are too wordy, repetitive and disorganised to be useful to the first time visitor. The best of them is the one entitled *Guide for parents/carers of children and people on the autistic spectrum and related conditions* which has by far the clearest overview.

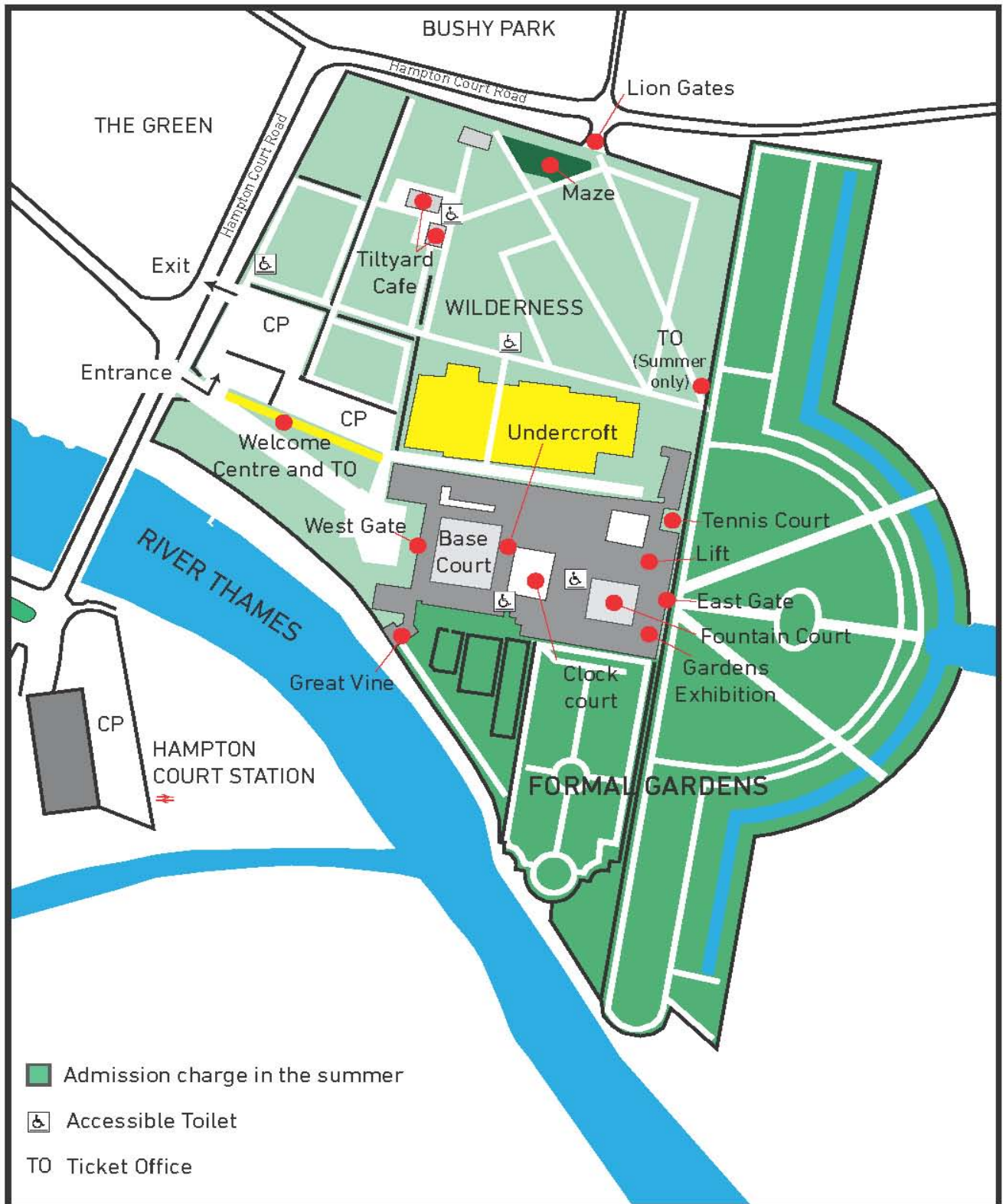
The CP, with 9 BB spaces, is approached from the main entrance near the northern end of the bridge. For free parking BB holders need to validate their CP ticket in the shop by the Welcome Centre when they leave. The CP is quite often full, and the Gates are then closed. If distance is an issue for you we would advise getting there early.

The nearest alternative CPs are at the station, an area on the Green, OR the CP in Bushy Park by the Diana Fountain. Although this is nearly 1km away from the Welcome Centre, parking there is free.

Hampton Court NR station is about 300m away from the main entrance, across the bridge. It has +2 steps to get to the platforms from the road, but there's a ramp to bypass these. Trains go to and from Waterloo. The CP is alongside the station.

The Welcome Centre, ticket office (TO) and shop are between the CP and the main tarmac drive leading to the West Gate. From the CP you come through the Welcome Centre, ticket office and shop, with ramps to bypass the small number of steps.

Companion/carers tickets, which are free, are only issued on the day, and you have to go via the main TO. Most of the formal gardens which wrap around three sides of the Palace can be visited free from October-March. In the summer, there's a charge for entering the darker green area on the map.



To get to the Palace, you can either go along the tarmac drive to the West Gate about 100m away, or go around some 500m through the gardens to the East Gate. There are a good number of benches for sitting in both the Palace and gardens.

The Palace

To go through the courtyards in the palace, and to visit the many rooms and sights, you need a ticket. The principal entrance is the West Gate, but it is possible to enter via the East Gate if you prefer. This is near the lift. During the summer, tickets may also be bought at the kiosk in the corner of the Wilderness (see the map).

If you want an audio guide (highly recommended) you will have to go via the Information Centre in the Undercroft off Base Court where you will be able to get additional maps including one entitled *Accessible routes*.

The Palace buildings cover an area of about 250m by 100m, with rooms to visit on two principal floors (GF and 1st floor). If you enter via the main West Gate, you will find the Base Court cobbles quite bumpy. The grass squares in Base Court were replaced a few years ago with very uneven stones. The path through the centre, and ones near the wall are slightly less rough. The smoothest route overall at this stage involves turning left after the West Gate entrance, and left again, going inside the Palace. The first door leads into a corridor where the surfaces are certainly smoother than those in the Court. You can follow this around to the corner where the Undercroft is, and pick up your audio guide. In the Undercroft the 3 or 4 steps are well ramped.

From here you can either follow the internal corridor past the Tudor kitchens, towards the Chapel Royal, and to where the lift is, or go through the central, open Courts. The surfaces in Clock Court and around Fountain Court are a bit smoother than Base Court.

People visiting the Palace are ‘free to wander’ and there is no set route. There is, however, a step-free route on the 1st floor of the Palace linking most of the State Apartments.

If you want, you could easily spend as much as 2 to 3 hours in the Palace if you go through the various apartments listening to their history, and looking at the artworks on display. You may also see a number of actors playing period roles, and adding to the interest of your visit.

We noted from the basic map, that visiting the State Apartments involved five separate sets of steps (about ± 20 to ± 30 in each case), so using the lift and eliminating these is a great advantage to anyone with a mobility issue. The lift (D85 W110 L150) is at the east end of the Palace, near the exit to the Gardens. You will need to ask a warder, and will be following a slightly different route from that of other visitors on the upper floor. The staff will show you where to go, and open doors to get into the next area when necessary.

Note that only six chair users are allowed on the 1st floor at any one time.

Our suggestion is that you don't necessarily need to see ALL of the apartments, and there's benefit in being selective. If you see too much there's a fair chance that you'll remember less - and get more knackered !

The lift comes up in the middle of Mary II's apartments, marked in green, and very near the end of the Georgian private apartments, marked in blue. We suggest that you choose one of these, since both of them have links to Henry VIII's apartments, which aren't to be missed. There's the Great Hall, the Council Chamber (where several dignitaries discuss how to deal with Henry's wish to re-marry), and the view you can get of the magnificent Chapel Royal

ceiling from the Royal Pew. There's a small step down into the Buttery where there's a video. Just visiting two areas (as we've suggested) will take you along some 400m, AND you'll see a lot. However, IF you're still up for it, you can get to the other two areas, including the first floor part of William III's apartments, making the total distance about 750m.

To get to the area telling Young Henry VIII's story involves -3-1, a barrier to those in electric chairs, and to many others. There's a virtual presentation about this part of the story in the Undercroft for those particularly interested.

William III's apartments are on both the 1st floor and GF (off Clock Court). The 1st floor part is step-free from the Georgian area.

On the GF, don't miss a visit to the Chapel Royal, which is step-free, nor to the Tudor Kitchens. These are ramped, except for the Wine Cellar to which there are -8 steps. You can get a good view of the cellar through the door on the corridor.

In the Privy Kitchen, which is a small café, the 2 steps can be bypassed if you ask a staff member. The tables there are long wooden ones with backless bench seats on either side.

Depending on the time of year and/or events, Mantegna's painting of the Triumphs of Caesar is either accessed off Base Court, or from the Garden (near the Great Vine).

There are accessible toilets on the GF:

- **wheelchair toilet (D75 ST70)** on the corridor between Base and Clock Courts, near Young Henry VIII's story;
- **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST75)** off Fountains Court (west side), where it is only signed 'Womens' outside, and there's a corridor/hallway leading to the loos. The unisex accessible toilet is almost straight ahead, before the door to the womens area. However, your male surveyor was told firmly by two ladies in the hallway that the mens toilet was the other side of the Court !
- off Base Court there are BCF in both the mens and womens, but a step to get in.

The Gardens

From the CP, the route through the gardens at the side of the Palace (towards the Lion Gate), via the Tudor Gardens and the Wilderness is free. The formal gardens behind the East end of the Palace (the Great Fountain Garden), right around past the Privy Garden and towards the Great Vine are also free during the winter months.

The area is generally flat and the paths around the Wilderness, towards the Maze and around the Tiltyard Café are tarmac, as is the drive leading to the main Palace entrance at the West end. **However, many of the paths around the Great Fountain Garden at the back, consist of thick crunchy gravel.**

The **Maze** is an outstanding feature, with about 800m of winding paths, and a slightly counter-intuitive 'secret' for getting to the middle (we won't say more). It is suitable for manual chair users, but electric chair and scooter users generally need too big a turning circle at the dead ends to enable them to turn round. You may need to consult a staff member about the suitability of your vehicle.

The **Tiltyard Café** has step-free access and provide a wide variety of foods.

The **Royal Tennis Court** has 1 step getting in and +2 at the exit. If these are a problem you can go out the way you came in.

The **Gardens Exhibition** is reached through the garden shop and by the East Gate. -1 [2cm] small step/ridge getting into the shop. Both the shop and exhibition are step-free, if slightly

congested. There's an interesting video about the gardens. The +2 small steps in the exhibition are bypassed by a ramp which is behind the wall.

There are accessible toilets:

- by the main road near the corner of the CP with **wheelchair cubicles (D90 ST80)** and BCF in both the mens and womens toilets;
- in the Tiltyard Café which has a **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST80 NKS)** with BCF;
- on the opposite side of the Wilderness from the Lion Gate, **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80)**;
- during the summer there's an additional accessible toilet next to the Lion Gate.

Note that there are no toilets on the sides of the Palace to the east and the south (and if you visit the Great Vine, you have quite a long way to go to get to a loo !).

During the summer, there's a horse-drawn Tram operating from the East Gate, which goes for a 20 minute ride around the gardens, and we are told that there is a wheelchair space. The garden shop near the East Gate is step-free, and sells entrance tickets. The route around to the Great Vine, and the viewing area for it are step-free.