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Hampton Court Palace

A favourite among more than 60 homes, with 1,600 meals a day and letters still in the roof.

Historic Royal Palaces says the original Tudor palace was begun by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey in the early 16th century. Henry VIII, who had over 60 homes, made it his favourite, and brought all six of his wives here. By the 1530s it was "a palace, a hotel, a theatre and a vast leisure complex."

A kitchen like a food factory

Around Base Court there were 30 suites of lodgings for the grandest visitors. "Up to 800 courtiers could accompany Henry VIII; all needed to be fed." The kitchens "became an efficient food factory serving 1600 meals a day." The king enlarged a Great Kitchen built in the late 1400s by a former resident, Lord Daubeney. In the Great Hall, dinner began at 10 in the morning and supper at 4 in the afternoon.

H and A, still in the wood

Masons began the present Great Hall in 1532. By 1533, when carpenters worked on the huge timber roof, Henry was married to Anne Boleyn. They added her coat-of-arms and carved the entwined letters H and A on the wooden screen. Historic Royal Palaces says those reminders "can still be seen today," with her falcon badge and the initials AR for Anna Regina. Carved heads called Eavesdroppers look down from the roof — "perhaps," the official page says, "as a warning to gossiping courtiers."

A game of tennis, and an arrest

Tennis was the favourite game of Henry VIII. In 1519 the Venetian Ambassador wrote that "it was the prettiest thing in the world to see him play." The first court was built for Wolsey between 1526 and 1529. And Anne Boleyn "was gambling on a game of tennis when she was arrested to be taken to the Tower of London. She even complained that she couldn't collect her winnings!"

Jane Seymour died here, giving the king a son, Edward. Catherine Howard was arrested here and later executed at the Tower. In 1838 Queen Victoria ordered the gates be "thrown open to all her subjects." By 1881, over ten million visitors had been recorded.

Sources, checked 17 November 2026: Historic Royal Palaces pages on the story of Hampton Court, the Tudor court, the Great Hall, and royal tennis. This typographic sheet has no photographs. tudor.ages.im is independent of Historic Royal Palaces.
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