

Factsheet

King George III's Life Mask

On entering the first room of Kew Palace, visitors will immediately come face-to-face with George III when they are greeted with a stunningly realistic life mask of the King.

- The wax life cast of King George III was produced from an original mould, sculpted by Madame Tussaud herself around 1809. The cast displayed at Kew Palace was produced by Madame Tussaud's design studio by kind permission of their Directors in 1997.
- The cast is made from bees wax and painted with oil paints, which gives the 'skin' a translucent effect.
- The hair, modelled in the style worn by the King in the late 18th Century, is made from yaks hair. Along the hairline, hair has been directly inserted into the wax itself. A separate wig (the bulk of the hair) is attached just above the ears.
- Specialists at Madame Tussauds undertook work to bring the model 'back to life' in their studios. Their work usually involves removing layers of old paint and starting with a blank canvas. Historic Royal Palaces, however, asked them to leave the original paint on George III's life mask and 'touch up' his face, using historic portraits of the King for reference.
- Work on the face involved:
 - Gentle washing with soap and water to remove surface dirt ingrained in the wax, in particular around the eyes and lips;
 - Scratches and small gouges were smoothed over and filled in with wax;
 - Oil paint was used to counterbalance the yellowed wax, reducing the orange glow of the face;
 - Colour was added to the eyelids and the acrylic eye balls were cleaned in-situ, bringing the wax face back to life.
- Work on the hair involved:
 - Washing the hair seven times with shampoo to remove years of dirt and yellowing!

- One conditioning treatment that, over the course of a few hours, re-moisturised the dry yak's hair.
- Putting rollers in to recreate the well-known hair style of the period – these rollers were left in for seven days for the hair to naturally set.
- Finally a black ribbon was tied to the back of the hair and a white hairspray was applied to hold the style in place.