

Factsheet

King William III's Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace

- By the mid-sixteenth century there were Privy (Private) Gardens at all the main royal palaces to provide the Sovereign with security and privacy away from the affairs of State.
- The first Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace was laid out between 1530 and 1538 for King Henry VIII. The garden covered an area of just over 61m x 91m and was split into two areas. One of these contained brass sundials and numerous statues of heraldic beasts on poles. The other contained a bowling alley, a magnificent domed banqueting house and the Water Gallery which provided a landing stage from the Thames.
- The German, Thomas Platter, who was shown the Privy Garden towards the end of Elizabeth I's reign in 1599, described his impressions of the topiary:

'There were all manner of shapes, men and women, centaurs, sirens, serving maids with baskets, French lilies and delicate crenellations...trimmed and arranged picture-wise that their equal would be difficult to find.'
- Between 1599 and 1659 the layout of the garden was changed from the elaborate heraldic Tudor garden to four grass plats containing fine statuary.
- In 1689 William and Mary began to rebuild Henry VIII's royal lodgings in the more fashionable Baroque style of the continental courts. Raised terraces were built around the parterre of the Privy Garden and the plain grass plats were cut into forms known as gazon coupé - intricate patterns cut into the turf with a background of sand or gravel.
- By 1700 the rebuilding of the King's and Queens Apartments was complete. The Tudor Water Gallery was demolished and the Privy Garden was lengthened to its present size, covering an area of three acres. A wrought iron screen designed by Jean Tijou was constructed at the south end and clipped yews were placed on the east and west terraces. The gazon coupé was laid

out to a more sophisticated broderie design and pyramidal yews and clipped round-headed hollies were incorporated.

- The elaborate parterre of William III's time survived with minor alterations until the mid-eighteenth century. The changing fashion, however, turned against the controlled formality of the Baroque garden and William's garden became less formal. The yews and hollies were retained but were no longer clipped into shape and the statuary was removed.
- By the mid-nineteenth century, William and Mary's broderie had completely disappeared under the spreading canopy of trees, providing an informal and shady haven for visitors, rather than a private retreat for a King.
- Much of the original layout of the Privy Garden was revealed through a combination of archaeological and historical research during the 1995 restoration, which returned William III's garden to its 1702 state. Historical accuracy governed the design of the garden, from the elaborate broderie to the very flowers and shrubs which once grew there. The Privy garden contains 33,000 box plants, topiary and Queen Mary's Bower that survives from an earlier Privy Garden by William III and Mary II.
- The Privy Garden was re-opened to the public on 6th July 1995 by HRH the Prince of Wales, after four years of detailed research and restoration.