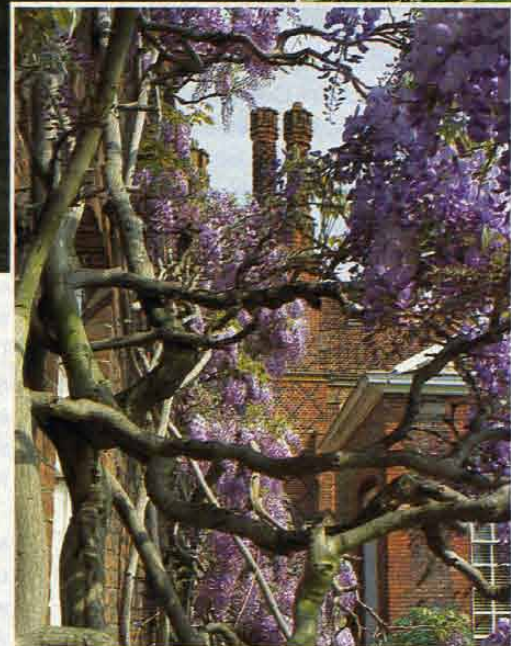


A CUT  
ABOVE  
Shorts to  
look sharp in



Clockwise from above:  
the Pond Garden, established  
by Henry VIII in 1538;  
the restored Privy Garden;  
dahlias in the Long Border;  
the Elizabethan Knot Garden;  
the Great Wisteria



# Courtly love

The grounds at Hampton Court are the passion of the garden designer and historian Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, who has worked there for ten years. He talks to Elspeth Thompson about their past, present and future. Photographs by Vivian Russell



Few places in Britain are so well-loved – yet so little-known – as Hampton Court. Many of us remember getting lost in the maze as children, or can picture pools of bright summer bedding stretching away beneath dark cones of yew in the Great Fountain Garden. A few may have visited the recently restored Privy Garden, with its scrolling embroidered beds and elaborate gilded gates on to the Thames. But how many are familiar with the rest of the 66 acres of gardens around the palace, with the stunning perennial borders in the Tiltyard Gardens, and the secluded walled rose garden, and the contemporary touches in the Twentieth-Century Gardens on the borders of Home Park?

One man closely acquainted with the more obscure corners of Hampton Court is Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, the garden designer and historian who has been gardens adviser to the palace for ten years. Part of the problem, he explains, is that day-trippers emerge from their tour of the palace too exhausted to take more than a superficial turn around the immense pleasure gardens. 'Also,' he adds, 'people continue to associate Hampton Court almost exclusively with the Tudor period, when in fact

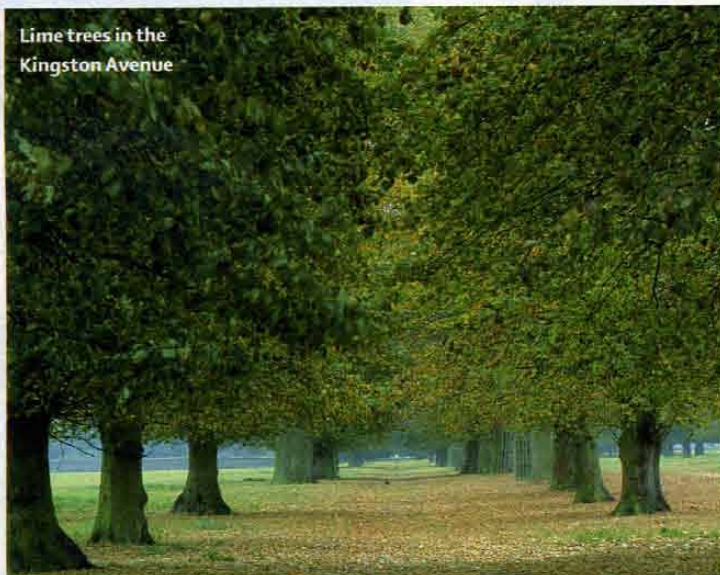
the gardens possess untold riches from more than five centuries, and maintained to the very highest standards.' Longstaffe-Gowan points out that Hampton Court possesses the largest surviving baroque landscape in Britain, and that few other gardens are so rich with historical associations, or bear such a bewildering array of garden styles and features. These different eras are explored in his new book, *The Gardens and Parks at Hampton Court Palace*, in which he champions not only the hidden areas of the garden but also the forgotten aspects of its social history.

Best-known as a royal residence, Hampton Court was only, in fact, a royal palace for about 200 years. When George II and his courtiers packed up and left in 1737 the palace became a 'grace-and-favour' residence for courtiers, minor and foreign aristocracy and their retainers. 'Incredible though it might seem, until the gardens were opened extensively to the public in 1838, these 700 or so fortunate inhabitants were able to enjoy them as their own,' Longstaffe-Gowan explains. The palace residents began gardening in the courtyards and little picket-fence enclosures, adding their own ornaments and plants, some of the

recorded in contemporary illustrations. Longstaffe-Gowan quotes Dickens's *Little Dorrit* on these 'venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile... encamped there like a sort of civilised gipsies.'

Meanwhile the rest of the gardens suffered: by 1780 the topiary bushes in the Privy Garden had become tall trees, the walks and avenues were neglected and the fountains were in bad order. Its immense popularity as what Trollope called a 'well-loved resort of Cockneydom' in the 19th century, with hundreds of thousands making the day trip from the East End, led to an upturn in the garden's fortunes – and the start of the spectacular carpet-bedding displays that remain such a source of pleasure today.

Although neglected during the First and Second World Wars, the gardens were, on the whole, well looked after during the 20th century. It was only in 1969 that Hampton Court was classified as an 'ancient monument' rather than a residential palace. The decade in which Longstaffe-Gowan has been gardens adviser has seen the pace of change accelerate. The restoration of the Privy Garden is now virtually complete, with impressive displays of potted hot-house exotics in summer. The Victorian waterworks of the Great Fountain Garden have been refurbished, with a single central jet that throws up water more plentifully than for the previous three centuries. And – perhaps most controversially – the elderly and infirm limes that lined the 17th-century



Lime trees in the Kingston Avenue

Long Water Avenue to the south of the Palace have been felled and replanted with 544 young trees.

Though he is anxious to point out that he is just one of a team guiding improvements, there seems little doubt that Longstaffe-Gowan's presence has had a galvanising effect. Future plans include recasting the Tudor Chapel Court to designs by the celebrated modern garden designer Piet Oudolf, and expanding cultivation and display of exotics in the Lower Orangery Garden. All good things still take time at the palace – 'replanting the avenues was first mooted in the mid-19th century and has taken until now to happen,' Longstaffe-Gowan says. 'Hampton Court is unique among the Royal Palaces in having a detailed management plan for the park and gardens – proof of the commitment to conserve them for the enjoyment of future generations.' It will be exciting to see the gardens embark on the next 500 years of their history. ●

*The gardens are open daily from 7am until dusk (admission £4). 'The Gardens and Parks at Hampton Court Palace' (Frances Lincoln, £25) by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan is available from Telegraph Books Direct (0870 155 7222) at £23 plus £2.25 p&p*

## vibrant blinds to liven up your home



**2 vert  
for  
£9**  
in our special  
clouds fabric

It's the perfect time of year for a fresh start, so revitalise your home with stylish made-to-measure blinds from Hillarys. Our ranges of Vertical, Venetian, Roller, Roman and Pleated blinds offer styles and colours to suit all tastes and may even add that extra touch you need!

Call us now on **0800 587 6460** to arrange an appointment with a helpful advisor or for a **free copy of our 'At Home' magazine** packed with inspirational ideas for every window of your home.

**for your free magazine or to book an appointment, call now**

**0800 587 6460**

8.30am - 9pm weekdays, 9am - 5pm weekends  
choose from our daytime, evening or weekend appointments

**to browse or buy just click [www.hillarys.co.uk](http://www.hillarys.co.uk)**

\*2 Verticals for £99 applies to 127mm louvres only in our special Clouds fabric and in blinds up to 2 metres wide. Offer does not apply to Curved headrails or Opus Verticals. Offer ends 1 July 2005.

measured   
made   
fitted

Hilla