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‘WERE OUR IDEAS OF MAINTAINING CONTROL MYTHICAL?’: FILM POLICY AT HAMPTON COURT PALACE, 1911–1989

Llewella Chapman

From 1851, the British government became responsible for the management of Hampton Court Palace in an arrangement of the Crown Lands Act, leading to the government maintaining the site on behalf of the reigning monarch ‘in right of Crown’. From 1911, the government considered whether to allow filmmakers access to Hampton Court for their productions. This article will trace the history of the film policy relating to this site until 1989, when Historic Royal Palaces was formed as an Executive Agency of Government to maintain the site, later acquiring charitable status in its own right in 1998. It will draw upon material held in the National Archives, which demonstrates how the film policy relating to Hampton Court adapted and changed over time. This article will analyse key film projects, both realised and unrealised, including Royal England: The Story of the Empire’s Throne (1911), Hampton Court Palace (1926) and The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933) to explore how the government approached allowing filmmakers access to the site, and the reasons behind their rigid stance toward film production on location within the broader context of the government’s support toward the British film industry more generally.

As with many heritage sites in the United Kingdom, Hampton Court Palace has often appeared in film and television programmes, including documentaries, such as Lucy Worsley’s *Britain’s Tudor Treasure: A Night at Hampton Court* (BBC, 2015) and *Royal Palace Secrets* (BBC, 2020), and dramas, for example *To Kill A King* (2003) and *The Favourite* (2018). Filmmakers have either used the site as a scenic backdrop, recreated the site’s interior apartments as a studio set, or more

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recently, captured the Palace through Computer Generated Imagery (CGI). There are three main reasons why heritage organisations allow film and television production companies access to a site. Firstly, because of the revenue which can be generated from this type of enterprise. For example, Major George Howard, Baron Howard of Henderskelfe, allowed the production of *Brideshead Revisited* (Granada Television, 1981), to access his property Castle Howard to generate funds to provide maintenance for the site. Secondly, allowing film and television companies access to a site can offer a variety of marketing opportunities for a heritage organisation, both at the time of a production, and through the post-production marketing of films and television programmes. Finally, it is widely recognised by the UK heritage sector that film and television can generate a high volume of visitors to a site, and therefore organisations may choose to use this for a site's marketing strategy, for example by offering a temporary film exhibition or being part of a cinematic tourist trail.

This article explores the film policy designed and introduced jointly by the Office of Works, later renamed the Ministry of Works, and the Lord Chamberlain's Office, from 1911 until 1989. As will be demonstrated in this article, government officials did not recognise the positive reasons to allow filmmaking at historic sites, and instead were concerned with three main negative reasons. Namely, a fear that filmmakers would make the Crown and royal palaces look 'ludicrous' and be disrespectful in their depiction of these institutions. That film production would be disruptive to both Grace and Favour residents and to visitors, i.e. whom government officials believed to be the 'rightful' users of Hampton Court. Finally, that if they were to afford 'preferential' treatment to one filmmaker, this would set a 'precedent' that would allow other filmmakers access to this site. It also becomes apparent when tracing through the various perspectives offered by government officials that the policy toward allowing filmmaking at the site was relatively ad hoc, fluid, and often formulated in retrospect, dependent upon an official's individual opinion regarding filmmakers and film more generally.

To research the impact of the government's overall policy towards British filmmakers using Hampton Court, the article will draw upon resources available in the British Library, the British Film Institute and The National Archives, Kew. My article places the government's policy within the broader context surrounding the overall approach from the government in support of the British film industry during this period. Furthermore, the article will contextualise the historic development of early filmmaking policies in place at sites of historic importance in order to understand the reasons behind why permissions were granted or withheld, drawing upon three key case studies of the film's *Royal England: The Story of the Empire's Throne* (1911), *Hampton Court Palace* (1926) and *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), when key changes were made in relation to the government's decisions to allow filming to take place at the site.

The rise of British academic interest on the impact of filmmaking and use of the heritage industry can be attributed to the distinct change in social, cultural and political norms during the 1980s, beginning when Margaret Thatcher was elected Conservative Prime Minister in 1979, including work by Patrick Wright, Robert Hewison and Raphael Samuel.¹ Andrew Higson, who first published on 'heritage'

films in his article 'Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film', writes on 'the cycle of quality costume dramas, or what I refer to here as heritage film' in the context of how these films promote 'images of Britain and Britishness (usually, in fact, Englishness)', and how they 'became commodities for consumption in the international image market'.² In later research, Higson suggests ways of understanding how the political, social and cultural influences apparent at the time a film is produced can influence the way in which heritage sites may choose to engage with the film and television industries. Higson points out that cinema 'is then one of the means of narrating nations, telling stories that enable audiences to imagine the nature of particular nations, demonstrating how a nation appears, what its people look like, and how they speak and behave and dress'.³ There is also a plethora of scholarly articles available on the notion of film-tourism, where they focus predominantly on the idea of tourist trails based on visiting locations where a film was produced, albeit mostly from either a tourism management or geography disciplinary perspective.⁴ An example of researching British film tourism was produced by Amy Sargeant, writing on the BBC series *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) and its 'interconnectedness with a number of cultural industries including heritage, museums, tourism, publishing and television'.⁵ Furthermore, Mandy Merck's edited collection, *The British Monarchy on Screen*, includes chapters on representations of different royals on screen, researching how royalty is used as both a 'patriotic signifier and entertainment commodity' to promote Britain and Britishness.⁶ My work develops on from these examples by tracing early government involvement and influence toward allowing filmmakers access to Hampton Court, and particular, unique concerns over the site's status as a former royal palace, and that filmmakers may bring the site into disrepute through its representation on film and television.

'This sort of sham is to be deprecated': Film policy at Hampton Court Palace, 1911–1925

From 1851, the government became responsible for the management of Hampton Court in an arrangement of the Crown Lands Act, leading to the government maintaining the site on behalf of the monarch 'in right of Crown'.⁷ Other historic sites that fell under the control of the government included Caernarfon Castle, Stonehenge and the Tower of London. Policy relating to film production at Hampton Court was drafted and agreed between the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's Office, who were responsible for obtaining permission from the monarch to allow external photography and film to be undertaken at the site. Photography, both official and amateur, was allowed within Hampton Court from 1907, and in 1911 the question of whether cinematography could be allowed at the site was addressed.

According to the evidence available in the National Archives, the first filmmaker who applied to make use of Hampton Court as a 'scenic backdrop' was Leo Stormont in 1911. Stormont had previously directed *England Invaded* (1909), a short invasion-scare film. Writing to the Office of Works, Stormont wanted 'permission to take two short cinematograph photographs of only one minute's

duration each at Hampton Court Palace grounds' and included a synopsis of the film he intended to make provisionally titled *Royal England, A Story of an Empire's Throne*.⁸ The film intended to capture 'cinematograph pictures illustrating momentous events in English history ... The scenes will be enacted by actors and actresses, in costumes of the periods chosen, and in appropriate scenery', referring to Stormont's intention to depict different historic periods. Stormont explained that the film was to be shown at the London Hippodrome during the period of George V's Coronation, and expressed that he only wished to film in parts of the sites which were available to the public, 'not to any private places', and before Hampton Court opened to visitors.⁹ He also stressed to the Office of Works that: 'The taking of pictures would not occupy more than ten minutes, and there would of course be no interference with the buildings, and no possibility of damage even to a blade of grass.'

After Stormont's request, a memorandum was circulated between the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's Office to debate the application. The responses indicate the different, opposing opinions as to whether filming should be allowed. 'E.C.' wrote: 'I see no objection to this subject to the Board's approval and on condition that this applicant makes an appointment for the purpose with respect so far as Hampton Court Palace is concerned.'¹⁰ 'W.F.D.' replied that if Stormont was to be allowed to film 'in this special case that it should be made quite clear that it can not be taken as a precedent', concerned that, 'we shall have the whole army of enterprising cinema-photographers wanting to follow suit'. 'S.K.D', however, slammed: 'This sort of sham is to be deprecated: and we may refuse,' and the Office of Works replied to Stormont to that effect. Undeterred by the government's response, Stormont shot his cinematograph pictures elsewhere, and *Royal England, A Story of an Empire's Throne* was released at the Hippodrome Theatre, London, on 26 June 1911 as reported by the *Pall Mall Gazette* which noted that:

The patriotic note is very much in evidence ... [Stormont] has called in the aid of the cinematograph to illustrate notable incidents in the history of England, beginning with the popular legend of Alfred allowing the cakes to burn and ending with George V.¹¹

However, Stormont's original application, as well as the government's debate and final decision, would come to influence later film policy at Hampton Court, as 'W.F.D' noted regarding their concerns regarding the amount of applications they might receive in the future. These exchanges between government officials set a precedent in relation to how the Office of Works permitted filming at the site, and is also an early indication of the differences of opinion that would continue throughout the decades that followed, namely between the government officials who were willing to engage with film producers, and those who believed filmmaking to be a 'sham', which is possibly a refusal borne of being prejudice against the cinema itself.

Later in the decade, Paul Kimberley, managing-director of Hepworth Picture Plays, wrote to the Office of Works in 1919 complaining of the government's refusal to allow access to British filmmakers wishing to use 'various Royal parks

and buildings'.¹² Cecil Hepworth, a producer, director, writer and scenic photographer, was the pre-eminent British filmmaker of the decade, and his company, Hepworth Picture Plays, had produced films since 1897. Complaining that Britain was 'being gradually "Americanized" through the medium of cinematograph films', Kimberley issued a strong warning that: 'The film producing companies in this country have been very severely handicapped through the lack of interest or support extended to them by our own government departments.' Explaining that the film company had 'many times applied' for permission to film at various sites maintained by the Office of Works, including Hampton Court which had been refused, Kimberley stated that

our competitors in the United States are granted the fullest facilities by their government departments and any public bodies ... because the authorities there realise that this direct propaganda is the finest method that can be adopted to educate the rest of the world up to American ideals ... all these difficulties placed in our way prevent English film producing concerns from competing successfully with their American rivals ... the more British pictures that are sent out from this country containing this British atmosphere, the better it is for foreign countries to understand and appreciate British ideas and methods.¹³

It is unclear whether the Office of Works replied to Kimberley's letter, or heeded his warning at the time of American dominance and his call for the government to support the British film industry by allowing production companies access to the sites under its jurisdiction. However, this correspondence is important as it demonstrates similar concerns which the British government would come to have in the 1920s, and that subsequently led to the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927.

The number of applications must have been such that by 1922 the Office of Works was prompted to clarify the department's position in allowing filmmakers to make use of various historic buildings and royal parks under the department's control as a backdrop for cinematography. In a 'copy of the 1922 policy', circulated in 1926, it concluded that in relation to the use of 'Palaces, Monuments, Public Buildings, etc. as the background for historical plays',

we have hitherto discountenanced the introduction of Royal Palaces, Historic Buildings and ancient monuments, into scenes forming part of plays. We have, however, departed from the rigid attitude we at one time took up of not allowing film pictures to be taken of such places with any kind of actors in them. We have allowed Hampton Court Palace to be used as the background of historical or legendary scenes introducing persons in costume on the strict understanding that the scenes were not to be worked up into plays. At Carnarvon Castle we have allowed films to be taken of scenes illustrative of Welsh history. At Stonehenge we felt bound to reject a proposal to take a film introducing Druids.¹⁴

Certainly, by 1923 it was evident that the Office of Works had begun to soften their 'rigid attitude' towards the production of film at Hampton Court. Edward Foxen Cooper, acknowledged as a 'Whitehall man of mystery' by Roger Smither and David Walsh, wrote to E. H. Bright at the Office of Works regarding an

event to be held on 14 November 1923 at the Hotel Victoria in London which was to provide publicity for the 'British Film Weeks', an all-British programme of films held between February and March 1924.¹⁵ Foxen Cooper began his career as a mechanical engineering draughtsman for the Fire Brigade Department of the London County Council in 1898 and became an early expert in the risks associated with the new medium of cinema. In 1915, he worked for the Board of Customs and Excise to advise on film, and by 1919 his services were also of use to the Foreign Office who wanted to develop the use of film for propaganda purposes, and Foxen Cooper became recognised as the government's 'advisor on cinematograph matters'.¹⁶

Regarding the 'British Film Weeks', Foxen Cooper explained that the Samuelson Film Company were to make a film, *The Motherland*, 'depicting historic places of interest', and that the production wanted to make use of the 'Courtyard of the House of Commons, the approaches to Windsor Castle and the walks in front of Hampton Court'.¹⁷ The intended purpose of the patriotic 'British Film Weeks' was to attempt to begin a renaissance of British cinema, and establish the importance of the industry in Britain and its wider Empire, particularly in relation to employment opportunities.¹⁸ In a minute sheet following the request, 'G.H.B.' wrote to Foxen Cooper to explain that the Office of Works felt an exception could be made in this instance, and permitted the Samuelson Film Company to make use of the sites listed because 'the films are historical, & in a sense educational, & I think the Board might be open to fair criticism if it took too archaic a view of this production'.¹⁹ However, 'G.H.B.' warned Foxen Cooper that although the Office of Works would grant the Samuelson Film Company permission to shoot at the locations requested, it was 'for the one special occasion only, which must not, in any circumstances, be taken as creating a precedent'.²⁰ The comment made by 'G.H.B.' is revealing in that it displays the growing acknowledgement of film as a medium for the projection of Britain and promotional propaganda, and the support of the government in assisting the growth of the British film industry: the 'British Film Weeks' being part of the government's intervention in order to protect the production sector of the British film industry from American, namely Hollywood, dominance.²¹ It also demonstrates that the Office of Works were continually adapting and changing their stance depending on who applied and a filmmakers reasons for wanting to film at the sites under their jurisdiction, which could explain the reason as to their fears surrounding 'creating a precedent' for future productions.

'A ludicrous travesty': Hampton Court Palace (1926) and the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927

Following the permission afforded to the Samuelson Film Company to use Hampton Court as a backdrop for *The Motherland*, it is evident in 1925 that the government and the Lord Chamberlain's Office were willing to depart further from their policy drafted in 1922 as demonstrated by the short black and white silent film *Hampton Court Palace* produced by Cosmopolitan Productions Limited. The company produced a series of twelve short films under the umbrella title of

Haunted Houses and Castles of Great Britain during 1925. Scripted and produced by George Banfield, this prestigious series of films included many of the key directors and actors in British cinema during this period. Maurice Elvey directed five: *Windsor Castle*, *Glamis Castle*, *Baddesley Manor*, *Kenilworth* and *Amy Robstart* and *Tower of London: The Nine Days Queen*; Charles Calvert, two: *The Mistletoe Bough* and *Monmouth Rebellion*; with the rest directed by A. V. Bramble (*Bodiam Castle: Eric the Slender*), Hugh Croise (*The Tichborne Dole*), Fred Paul (*Warwick Castle in Feudal Days*) and Walter West (*Woodcroft Castle*). *Hampton Court Palace* was directed by Bert Cann, a cameraman who specialised in still photography. The stars appearing in the series included Isobel Elsom, Betty Faire, Adeline Hayden Coffin, Isabel Jeans, Gladys Jennings, James Knight, Hugh Miller, Gabrielle Morton, John Stuart, Madge Stuart and Godfrey Tearle.

Cosmopolitan Productions obtained permission from the Lord Chamberlain Rowland Thomas Baring, 2nd Earl of Cromer, to film *Hampton Court Palace* at the site. Originally, the company applied to the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's Office to film at both Hampton Court and the Tower of London. Writing to Sir Lionel Earle, Permanent Secretary for the Office of Works, Sir George Crichton, Comptroller for the Lord Chamberlain's Office, asked that Earle review Cosmopolitan Productions' filming application. Crichton had ascertained that the company wanted 'to photograph both the interior and exterior of the Palace, and that the work would take about six hours. There would only be three characters, and there would be no question of excluding the ordinary visitors to the Palace'.²² On replying to Crichton, Earle explained that the Office of Works had already spoken to a 'representative here from the company who has explained that they merely want to use the Palace as a back-ground for some historical or legendary scenes in the costumes of the period'.²³ Earle was happy to grant permission to Cosmopolitan Productions on the proviso that they abided by their conditions: 'I think that as far as we are concerned they may be given the permission they ask for on the strict understanding that the scenes are not to be worked up into plays, and on the other conditions set out [in the 1922 film policy]'. However, the company was refused permission to film *Tower of London: The Nine Days Queen* at the Tower of London. This was in keeping with previous discussions surrounding filming at the site: while government officials were willing, up to a point, to allow filming at Hampton Court during this time, the Tower of London remained off-limits. As M. Connolly, Office of Works, explained to F. H. Slingsby, Treasury, 'the Constable [of the Tower] refuses all such applications'.²⁴

Production of the series of films began in July 1925. *Hampton Court Palace* was shot in August 1925 and was captured by the following photograph, published in the *Daily Mail* (Figure 1). At 1500 feet in length, *Hampton Court Palace's* narrative tells the legend of the ghost of Katherine Howard, who is believed to haunt the Processional Gallery at the site. The cast included Gabrielle Morton, Banfield's wife, as Katherine Howard, Shep Camp as Henry VIII, Eric Cowley as Thomas Culpepper, and Annesley Healy as the Duke of Norfolk. The focus of the film centres on the marriage between Henry VIII and Katherine Howard and a plot by her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, to prove her infidelity. The series of films was distributed by C & M Productions Limited, and was released to the trade on 5

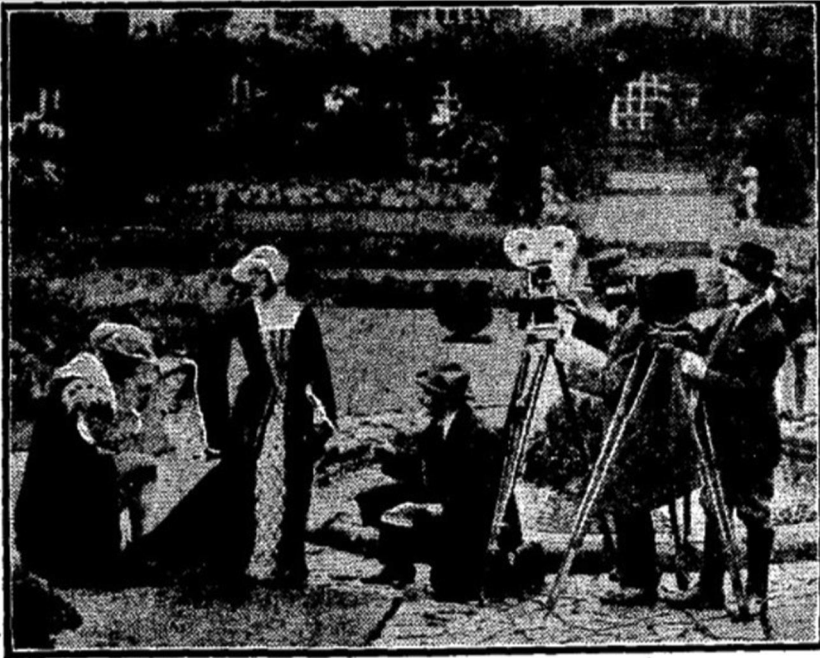


Figure 1. Filming of *Hampton Court Palace* on location.²⁵

January 1926 and later to the general public in September the same year. Two out of the twelve films, *The Mistletoe Bough* and *Baddesley Manor*, were screened at the Tivoli Theatre, The Strand, London. *Kinematograph Weekly* reported that both films 'augur well for the success of the group. They are adequately told ... Double photography on the ghostly element is very good, and the acting is, on the whole, of a good standard ... They should prove good and novel shorts for most audiences'.²⁶ Not everyone, however, was impressed by the series, especially *Hampton Court Palace*. S. R. Littlewood writing for *The Sphere* reviewed the film:

Here is a great tragic theme – one, as it happens, for which everything is ready and to hand. It has been turned, apparently 'by permission,' into a ludicrous travesty, studded with 'howlers' like the presentment of Katherine Howard walking through parts of the palace which any dunderhead should know are of the Wren period, and decorated with sentimental titles which quite rightly drew nothing but laughter.²⁷

What is interesting here, then, is firstly it is evident that this film clearly 'works scenes up in to plays', therefore going against the official policy of the Office of Works at the time, and which Earle directed that the company should strictly adhere to. Secondly, towards the end of *Hampton Court Palace*, certain scenes border on what could be perceived as 'ludicrous', as argued by Littlewood, particularly in relation to anachronistic architecture.

There were three reasons the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's Office granted permission to Cosmopolitan Productions. It is most likely that the government was not aware of the production company's intentions to 'work scenes

up in to plays' or include the 'ludicrous' use of a ghost walking through the Baroque parts of the Palace. Furthermore, it was around this time that the Treasury also began to realise that film was a possibly lucrative source of revenue for the government. In a letter from Slingsby to Connolly, the Treasury believed:

That the use of Crown buildings might with certain safeguards be granted to companies for the filming of scenes for historical plays ... Quite considerable revenue might be forthcoming from this source, particularly from the American producers. Have the possibilities ever been considered? ... It has been pointed out that the grant of the privilege of filming Hampton Court and the Tower of London if limited to British companies might constitute a valuable minor preference for the British industry. We think that British firms might get some preference ...²⁸

Connolly replied to Slingsby outlining the 1922 policy, and citing the examples of *The Motherland* and *Hampton Court Palace* explained: 'We did not in any of these cases raise the question of payment, and it seems very unlikely that it would be worth trying to get payment in return for the grant of such facilities being given'.²⁹ Another reason was that the government was gradually coming to understand that the British film industry was in need of support, leading to the implementation of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927: the very arguments made by Kimberley back in 1919.

There was, however, no mention of affording American production companies access to Hampton Court or other sites. According to Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street: 'Government attention was initially drawn to the film trade by the effects of Hollywood competition on British producers, and the response was to introduce commercial protection'.³⁰ By 1923 only 10 per cent of the films shown in Britain were actually made in Britain, and this fell further to 5 per cent by 1926.³¹ The popularity of viewing American films as opposed to British ones, as Jeffrey Richards notes, contributed to the British government's 'fear of Americanisation', and this, alongside the 'positive desire to see British films stressing British life and ideals' led to the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927.³² The aims of this Act were to increase the proportion of British films being shown in cinemas, to promote the development 'of a flourishing film industry', to use film production as a way of providing and increasing the employment of British citizens, and to promote and increase awareness of Britain abroad.³³ The Cinematograph Films Act was given royal assent on 20 December 1927. Most relevant here in terms of shooting films at Hampton Court is when Ramsay MacDonald, Leader of the Opposition, called in 1927 for film producers 'to use our own natural scenery; to use our history, which is more magnificent for film production than the history of any other nation in the world; to use the romance, the folklore, the tradition that has never been exploited for the film industry'.³⁴

Following the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927, it can be understood that this caused the Office of Works to relax their policy towards filming at Hampton Court and become more sympathetic towards British film productions. In 1930, Winifred Cory (née Graham) wrote to Baring suggesting that to be of assistance to the British film industry, she would like one of her novels, *The*

Power Behind the Throne co-authored with H. Fowler Mear, a prolific writer of quota quickies, to be produced as a film using Hampton Court as a backdrop. Cory claimed that she was 'told by a British producer that if he were allowed to film the Palace, it would be of world-wide interest'.³⁵ Baring forwarded Cory's letter to Earle, explaining that George V might be amenable to her proposal in support of the British film industry. However, he expressed the familiar concern that:

If once permission is given to have a film taken within the precincts of a Royal Palace we shall no doubt have requests for Kensington Palace, Holyrood, and possibly Windsor Castle itself to be used for such purposes and I do not myself like the idea.³⁶

Baring, however, did believe that if British production companies were allowed to shoot films within these sites they would be able to compete against American competition: 'even Hollywood cannot produce a setting such as could be obtained either at Hampton Court, Holyrood or Windsor'.

In Earle's reply to Baring, he explained: 'The tendency of late has been to modify to some extent our opposition to the use of places in our charge as the background for scenes in picture plays'.³⁷ Earle outlined that the reason for this was because the First Commissioner of the Office of Works, George Lansbury, had come to the view that 'partial relaxation of our rule might be made in certain cases in which inconvenience would not be likely to be caused to the general public'. While willing to relax the rules in order to help the British film industry, Earle marks two concerns in this correspondence: firstly, that Hampton Court should not be used for 'undignified' scenes, although he did not clarify what he believed these 'undignified' scenes may include, and secondly that it would not inconvenience the public or Grace and Favour residents at the Palace. The proviso that Hampton Court should not be used for the former may, perhaps, be due to the 'ludicrous' scenes appearing in *Hampton Court Palace*, although Earle did not cite this film explicitly. To alleviate these two fears, Earle suggested imposing strict conditions as to the time the production company would be allowed to film at the site, and approval of a film's scenario. In the event, both the Lord Chamberlain's Office and the Office of Works gave permission for Cory to produce her film at Hampton Court. There is no evidence to suggest that the film was realised, and after permission was granted to Cory the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported that: 'The producing company to take advantage of this offer has yet to be decided'.³⁸

Beyond the appeal made by Cory to be allowed to use Hampton Court as a site of film production, in 1932, Sir Stephen Tallents, Secretary for the Empire Marketing Board, published a pamphlet entitled *The Projection of England*, which contributed further toward the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's Office taking a more sympathetic stance toward the use of historic sites in British film production.³⁹ Tallents argued:

In the cause of good international understanding within the Empire and without it; for the sake of our export trade; in the interests of our tourist traffic; above all, perhaps, in the discharge of our great responsibilities to the

other countries of the Commonwealth of British peoples, we must master the art of national projection and must set ourselves to throw a fitting presentation of England upon the world's screen.⁴⁰

Tallents wished to project the 'acceptable face of Britain', and published a pamphlet where he outlined what and how Britain should be reflected in film. Most relevant to the allowing of production companies to film at Hampton Court is the 'national institutions and virtues' that Tallents called to represent which were: '*The Monarchy* (with its growing scarcity value)', and: 'In manufacture – *a reputation for quality*', and he went on to outline his own list of what he felt should be represented on film, including '*Oxford and St. Andrews; Piccadilly, Bond Street, Big Ben and Princes Street, Edinburgh; and the English countryside, English villages, the English home and English servants*'.⁴¹ In terms of what the government understood to be 'British' films, which was understandably an influence on the perception held by the Office of Works and Lord Chamberlain's Office as to the 'quality' British pictures they would permit to film at Hampton Court, Richards determines that: 'The politicians, who called repeatedly for films projecting Britain and the British way of life whenever the subject was raised by parliament, clearly meant the sort of subjects outlined by Sir Stephen Tallents', i.e. what was seemingly deemed by the government to be a 'dignified' use of monuments and historic buildings to appear in film.⁴²

'He is, as I was afraid, a tiresome fellow': large-scale filmmaking and *the Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933)

Following further relaxation of the rules relating to British films being produced at Hampton Court, the Office of Works received an application to shoot the biggest film to date at the site in 1933: London Film Productions' *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. The film's producer and director, Alexander Korda, had previously worked in Hollywood, where his first directing credit for the American studio First National Pictures was *The Stolen Bride* (1927). Korda was then commissioned to direct *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927). The focus on the private life of a famous historic figure was something which Korda would return to with *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Korda was interested in finding a suitable project for Charles Laughton and his wife, Elsa Lanchester, and there are many apocryphal stories regarding Korda's inspiration for making a film about Henry VIII, ranging from Laughton's resemblance to a statue of the monarch to a London cab driver singing the music hall song 'I'm Henery the Eighth, I Am'. The film originally intended to focus on the story of the short and unconsummated marriage of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves.⁴³ The script was written by Lajos Biro, and subsequently polished by Arthur Wimperis. The film's narrative broadened out from focussing on Anne of Cleves to include five of Henry's wives minus Catherine of Aragon.

In early May 1933 the film's production manager, David Cunynghame, wrote to the Office of Works to ask permission to shoot particular scenes at Hampton Court, and he explained that the production wanted to make use of the site 'during the course of the next few weeks', stressing that: 'As it is proposed to spend a considerable amount of money and time on the project it is hoped to make a really high class

film'.⁴⁴ After an initial meeting between Cunynghame and E. H. Donahue of the Office of Works, it was confirmed by the Lord Chamberlain's Office that Baring had given his permission for London Film Productions to access Hampton Court.⁴⁵ This letter explained that 'the work will take about three days to complete' and the specific parts of the Palace that were required: '1. On the bridge across the moat; 2. In the old Tudor and Knot Gardens; 3. In a courtyard near the kitchens; 4. On the parapet overlooking the river'. Permission was given on the provision that all filming would be completed before Hampton Court opened to visitors at 9 am, and that it would not disturb the Grace and Favour residents. After permission was granted, Cunynghame met with Donahue to clarify the film's production schedule. A memorandum written by Donahue at the end of May revealed that Cunynghame 'complained that to finish [shooting] at 9 am would give but little time each day and they would require many more days at the Palace, and asked for an extended time'.⁴⁶ Donahue wrote that he extended the time to 9.30, in keeping with previous extensions granted to production companies. Following this agreement, Donahue confirmed with Cunynghame that 'about 50 performers in costume, 6 horses, and a sound van will be employed', and iterated that filming could commence from 6 am but not beyond 9.30 am.⁴⁷

After being refused permission to film after 9.30 am by the Office of Works, Cunynghame attempted to change their decision by contacting other government departments. First, he arranged for his father, Sir Percy Cunynghame, to approach Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, who subsequently passed on the request to Sir William Ormsby Gore, First Commissioner of Works, asking whether the Office of Works could be of assistance in Cunynghame's 'endeavours'.⁴⁸ Ormsby Gore explained in his reply to Hoare that 'a film dealing with the time of Henry VIII is, at the moment, being produced at Hampton Court', and that the Office of Works had already agreed to allow London Film Productions to use the site for the production of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.⁴⁹ After failing to secure permission to film after 9.30 am at the site through his father, Cunynghame attempted to appeal to the Lord Chamberlain's Office through his mother's friend, Bertha Dawkins, to Sir Clive Wigram, Private Secretary to the Sovereign. Wigram forwarded this request to Sir Patrick Duff, Permanent Secretary for the Office of Works, to ask for his assistance in the matter.⁵⁰ Duff replied to Wigram, requesting that 'as Mr. Cunynghame is somewhat dissatisfied with the decision of this Office, and he has appealed to you over our heads... the reply to the letter should come from you'.⁵¹ Clarifying the position of the Office of Works in the matter, Duff explained:

What Mr. Cunynghame wants... is permission to photograph all day at Hampton Court Palace so as to get through the work in the very shortest possible time. This would save his Company expense, and, as he very reasonably observes, the fewer the visits which the Company paid the less trouble they would give. This might be alright if Mr. Cunynghame were the only pebble on the beach: but the fact is that we have other applications from film companies, and if one company is allowed to work at Hampton Court at any hour of the day one would have to give the same concession to anyone else who asked for it.

Duff also expressed his concern about the possible disturbance which might be caused to Grace and Favour residents and visitors if filming were to be allowed during the day:

I know that if I were paying a visit to Hampton Court Palace and found the place full of film people rehearsing and ‘shots’, as they call it, being taken, I should feel that the dignity and beauty of the place was destroyed.

Suggesting to Wigram a possible line of reply to Cunynghame, Duff asserted:

it would be that you do not feel that the Office of Works are not being wilfully obstructive, or that they are unsympathetic to the idea of his British film. The fact that they have given his facilities up till 9.30 a.m., etc., shows that they are cut out [*sic*] to do what they reasonably can ... Mr. Cunynghame must realise that Hampton Court Palace is maintained at the public charges, and the public, therefore, rightly expect to have undisturbed access to it, while there is also the comfort of the residents to be considered.

Wigram’s reply to Duff is short, but to the point: ‘Thank you for your letter regarding Mr. Cunynghame. He is, as I was afraid, a tiresome fellow and I will answer him on the lines you suggest’.⁵² This correspondence demonstrates that while the Office of Works was more willing to allow Hampton Court to be used as a film location, particularly for such a large-scale production, they were unwilling to deviate from the policy relating to the time in which filmmakers could access the site, so as not to be of disturbance to Grace and Favour residents or visitors, nor were the scenes to be filmed at this site to be deemed ‘undignified’ or ‘ludicrous’.

Due to the impasse between the Office of Works and London Film Productions, the only part of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* filmed at Hampton Court was the opening shot taken from Anne Boleyn’s Gateway of the Great Gatehouse (Figure 2) and of Anne Boleyn’s Gateway and the Astronomical Clock, taken from George II’s Archway (Figure 3). Instead, Vincent Korda, the film’s set designer, built the Great Hall interior as a studio set at Elstree (Figure 4) and location scenes were shot at Hatfield House. Despite the issues of not being able to film on location at Hampton Court owing to the conditions imposed by the government, the realised film went on to be a critical and commercial success, with the film being nominated for an Academy Award for Best Film, and Charles Laughton winning the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Henry VIII in 1934. In a contemporary review of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* by C. A. Lejeune, she believed the success of the film was due to the cast and crew ensemble, and that it would bring prestige to the British Film Industry as: ‘British films have been the sort of thing that Hollywood can do just as well or better’.⁵³ Going further, she explained that Korda’s success is based on ‘clever casting, careful detail, grand photography, good set construction, but chiefly due to a very remarkable scenario’. Lejeune described *The Private Life of Henry VIII* as ‘national to the backbone’, and ‘not jingoistic, but as broadly and staunchly English as a baron of beef and a tankard of the best home brew’.⁵⁴



Figure 2. Opening shot of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, displaying the Great Gatehouse.



Figure 3. Following shot of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, displaying Anne Boleyn's Archway and the Astronomical Clock.



Figure 4. The Great Hall set, recreated in studio for *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.

‘We feel that we must assist [British] film producers where we can’: later film policy, 1940–1950

The next time that the question of the cinematographic policy at Hampton Court was addressed was in 1947. By this time, the Office of Works had been renamed the Ministry of Works, formed in 1943 to organise the requisition of property for wartime use. The reason behind reviewing the policy towards filming at Hampton Court was two-fold. Firstly, the government toward the end of this decade were once again concerned about Hollywood’s domination of the film industry and the lack of finance for British film production. To address this, the exhibitors’ quota for main feature films was raised to 45 per cent in 1948, and the Cinematograph Film Production (Special Loans) Act of 1949 established the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) to distribute loans for film production. The exhibitors’ quota was subsequently reduced to 40 per cent in 1949, and 30 per cent in 1950. Secondly, there were questions from British film production companies during this time as to what would be allowed at Hampton Court.

In 1947, E. H. Donahue wrote to G. A. Titman at the Lord Chamberlain’s Office regarding an application made by John Hawkesworth of the British Lion Film Corporation for permission to measure parts of the ‘State Rooms’ at Hampton Court for *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1948) to build a set.⁵⁵ This film was directed by Anthony Kimmins and produced by Alexander Korda for London Film Productions. Shot on location in Scotland and at Shepperton Studios, the film’s plot centred around the Jacobite Rising of 1745 where the ‘Young Pretender’, Charles Edward

Stuart (David Niven), led an insurrection to overthrow the Protestant Hanoverians and restore the Catholic Stuart family to the throne. In assessing Hawkesworth's request, Donohue outlined to Titman a previous position that had been held by the Office of Works in regard to filming at Hampton Court, and questioned:

Were our ideas of maintaining control mythical? I suppose anyone could reconstruct a replica of the rooms from material furnished in existing publications... This being the case, there is at present no hindrance to the exhibition of *Bonnie Prince Charlie* at Hampton Court Palace. Was he ever there I wonder? Is he to be shown listening in disguise to discussions about himself at one of George II's Councils in the Palace? Or, as wooing a Lady in Waiting there? I have seen somewhere that *Oliver Twist* visited the Palace. A replica of the rooms could be used for his story too...⁵⁶

Donohue concluded that he felt that there was little that could be done to stop parts of the Palace being replicated as a studio set. Titman replied in agreement, and while he asserted that: 'In these times, however, we feel that we must assist [British] film producers where we can', believed:

Although, of course, we must resist any effort which might lower the dignity of any of the Royal Palaces... I have checked that this is a serious film. History as revealed on the screen is full of hitherto undiscovered facts, and no doubt when the present work of art is out the Young Chevalier will twirl rapidly in his grave.⁵⁷

London Film Productions was permitted to measure parts of Hampton Court in order to design and build sets for the film in studio, likely because this had already been done for *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Unlike *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, however, *Bonnie Prince Charlie* was a disaster at the box office. The cost of making *Bonnie Prince Charlie* totalled £760,000, and on its release received a net revenue through distribution of £155,570.⁵⁸ This was perhaps in part due to the shooting of the film, which proved problematic. As David Niven later recalled:

Bonnie Prince Charlie was one of those huge, florid extravaganzas that reek of disaster from the start. There was never a completed screenplay... we suffered three changes of directors, with Korda himself desperately taking over... I loved Alex Korda, a brilliant, generous creature, but with this film he was wallowing in confusion.⁵⁹

After allowing the measuring of State Rooms at Hampton Court for the purposes of building studio sets for feature films, there were two other types of film that the Ministry of Works would permit access to the site during this period. Those that were endorsed by the government, for example political and propaganda films, and educational documentaries, which can be understood from the two following examples. First, in August 1947, the Ministry of Works gave permission for colour tests to be taken by J. Mellor of Editorial Film Productions Limited. The reason behind these colour tests was to make a short film trailer of a Gold Coast Police Band performing the National Anthem. As explained by P. L. Long, working for the Films Division of the Central Office of Information in a letter to the Ministry of Works: 'This trailer has been specially requested by the Colonial Office for distribution in the Gold Coast and it has been suggested that we should use the Police Band

for this purpose and photograph them against a background of Hampton Court Palace'.⁶⁰ The filming of the trailer was intended to take place on the 21 August or 22 August depending on the weather, and Long also explained that it would be necessary to use camera and sound equipment for filming. Donahue replied to Long approving the proposal subject to the usual conditions in place for filming at the site; namely that all details of the film were to be agreed by the Superintendents working at Hampton Court, F. J. Bright and W. J. Hepburn, the work be conducted between Monday to Saturday outside of visiting hours, and that the public and Grace and Favour residents of the Palace remained undisturbed. However, Donahue explained that the restriction to the time that filming was permitted was 'regretted, but it is one which is enforced for all filming work, and as there will probably be another film company working at the Palace during this month, likewise bound by the same restriction, no relaxation can be made in this instance'.⁶¹ After further discussion, Donahue wrote to Long explaining that due to the 'consideration of the special semi-experimental circumstances in which this trailer is being made', the Ministry of Works was prepared to relax the restriction of times that the trailer could be shot, and permitted the production to be filmed throughout the day while stipulating that 'this concession does not apply to Sunday, when no filming work may be done, and must not be taken as a precedent'.⁶²

A month later, a production company obtained permission to film an educational documentary within the interior of Hampton Court for the first time. Alex Strasser of the Realist Film Unit wrote to Titman for permission to produce 'an educational film on the subject of "heating and health", and in consequence we intend to show a short sequence on the development of the English fire place, including a specimen of the Tudor type'.⁶³ Strasser outlined that the company wished to photograph a fireplace 'in the Cardinal Wolsey Rooms' between 20 September and 1 October. Permission to shoot in the Palace's interior this was given by Donahue, and this was likely due to it firstly being for an educational documentary film, and secondly because no actors were involved.⁶⁴

While the Ministry of Works was willing to accommodate certain types of filming beyond what they would normally allow for propaganda and education purposes, there was still one point of the film policy that they appeared unwilling to deviate from, namely allowing foreign, particularly American, companies the right to use Hampton Court as a backdrop for film projects. In September 1949 Ernest Betts, Director of Publicity for Twentieth Century-Fox Productions, wrote to Donahue to ask permission for two actors, Richard Widmark and Gene Tierney, to have their photographs taken at Hampton Court to publicise the forthcoming film *Night and the City* (1950).⁶⁵ Specifically, Betts proposed to take still photographs of the actors in an interior room at Hampton Court. Writing to Titman, Donahue explained that he had refused Betts' request on the following grounds: firstly, he had proposed taking shots in the Palace interior, the 'State Rooms', which had not been allowed previously. Secondly, because access was requested between 5 and 11 pm. Finally, and likely the main reason for the refusal was

you would have to know something about the proposed film. In the past the King had not objected to the use of His Palace for filming purposes provided that the Palace was the background of something really historical. I didn't think He

would approve it as a background for some sentimental trashy stuff; less still would he be likely to agree to it being for a halo for two or three stars.⁶⁶

In his reply, Titman concurred with the concerns expressed by Donahue: 'I am glad ... that you managed to resist the blandishments of Twentieth Century-Fox, for it is most unlikely that we should ever permit Hampton Court Palace to be used for "puffing" film stars'.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Post 1950, little changed in the way of amending the film policy relating to Hampton Court in order to assist and support the British film industry. The last time the policy was adapted was in 1980, before Hampton Court came under the jurisdiction of Historic Royal Palaces. In an internal memorandum circulated by the Lord Chamberlain's Office from Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Eric Penn to various Superintendents at different Royal Palaces including Hampton Court in June 1980, Penn informed them: 'Lord Chamberlain [Baron Charles Maclean] has up-dated the guide-lines as to what filming and photography might be allowed in Royal Palaces and other Royal Residences'.⁶⁸ Specifically, the exterior of Hampton Court was allowed to be filmed in accordance with the following rules: '1. Photography and sketching from public precincts is allowed. A permit is required for a tripod or easel. 2. Filming can be done from the public precincts (a) Features – establishing shot only: no actors. (b) Documentaries – including commentator talking to camera'.⁶⁹ This displays that, as with previous policies, the Lord Chamberlain's Office remained disinclined toward allowing actors to be filmed at Hampton Court. For the interior of Hampton Court, the film and photography policy of 1980 stated: '1. Permission to film in the Chapel Royal for an appropriate documentary will be considered. 2. Department of the Environment has photographs of State Rooms and Chapel Royal for reproduction'.⁷⁰ The updated policy made no mention of feature film applications being allowed to shoot within the site's interior and it insinuated that production companies would only be able to use stock footage for reproduction. Applications to film at the site no longer needed to be obtained from both the Lord Chamberlain's Office and the Ministry of Works, and instead the decision would lie with 'the care of Department of the Environment which has no fixed rules'.⁷¹

It can be understood that the British government provided the foundations of Hampton Court's relationship with film and television, and its policy toward filmmaking there. The three main points of the original cinematograph policy drafted in 1922 were that filming should not disrupt visitors and therefore should take place outside of public admission times, foreign (namely American) production companies were not permitted to use Hampton Court, and finally, filmmakers were allowed to use Hampton Court for 'historical or legendary scenes introducing persons in costume on the strict understanding that the scenes were not to be worked up into plays' on the proviso that the scenes were not deemed 'ludicrous'. However, there were certain occasions when the Office of Works, latterly the Ministry of Works, and the Lord Chamberlain's Office appeared to be willing to deviate from these points of the cinematograph policy. Certain filmmaking was allowed during visitor hours, namely

for films which were made for government propaganda purposes, news events or educational documentaries. The government also remained unmoving in regard to privileging British-produced films over foreign film productions in their policy. The main area where they deviated from policy was in the type of film that was allowed to be produced at Hampton Court, usually in order to support the British film industry against stronger American competition. There were also times where the government would allow films which ‘worked scenes into plays’, as well as some where certain scenes could be understood to be ‘ludicrous’, for example *Hampton Court Palace* (1926). This demonstrates that there was some flexibility in the cinematograph policy applied at Hampton Court dependent upon the need of the British film industry at the time of a film’s production. Nevertheless, while the government may have been supportive of the British film industry, certain government officials remained generally unsympathetic, and wrongly believed that the ‘novelty’ of using Hampton Court as a backdrop for film would wear off over time, with Duff predicting prior to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*: ‘once the background of Hampton Court Palace has been utilised it will cease to have the attraction of novelty; and, with films as with the press, novelty seems to be the only thing that matters’.⁷²

As can be understood from later applications to film at this site, this was not the case, and today Hampton Court has been used in films including *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) and *Jack and the Giant Slayer* (2013). When this site became maintained by Historic Royal Palaces, an Executive Agency of Government, from 1989, we can understand that previous government policy impacted on the way that this organisation approached allowing access for film and television companies, as this was initially kept the same. As the organisation grew, and became more distanced from the government, especially since 1998 when Historic Royal Palaces attained charitable status and did not receive government funding to assist the maintenance of its sites, it became more accommodating towards who was allowed permission to film at Hampton Court, and the type of filming which could take place. Furthermore, Historic Royal Palaces began to recognise not only the potential revenue that could be generated from filmmaking that took place at the site, but also that it could use its curators as ‘star vehicles’ with which to promote Hampton Court and the site’s history through television documentaries, for example Suzannah Lipscomb and Lucy Worsley. Whether Titman would ‘twirl rapidly in his grave’ over the use of Hampton Court for these later film and television productions, as he predicted the ‘Young Chevalier’ would do over *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, remains to be seen.

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