

HISTORIC SCOTLAND



INSIDE THE ROYAL PALACE

STEP BACK IN TIME TO THE SCOTTISH RENAISSANCE COURT



STIRLING
CASTLE

Historic Scotland is reviving the Renaissance look and feel of the six major apartments on the principle level of the castle's royal palace. The rooms or 'lodgings' were divided between the king and queen – each had an outer hall, inner hall and a bed chamber, set symmetrically round an inner courtyard.

Royal Ambitions

The royal lodgings were designed to impress. James V's ambition was to lift Scotland into the premier league of European nations. This was made possible thanks to his marital alliance with the rich de Guise family. A splendid palace, built according to the latest architectural ideas and with the most fashionable furnishings and fittings, would show that he was a monarch to be reckoned with. Stirling was ideal for such an undertaking as it was one of James' favourite residences, already well-developed as a place of pleasure, with fine gardens, excellent hunting and a magnificent Great Hall.

The palace project is the largest programme Historic Scotland has ever undertaken to conserve a building and upgrade its appeal as a visitor attraction. Extensive studies have taken place to ensure the authenticity of everything from the wall hangings to the window glass. The colours, motifs and fabrics have all been meticulously researched by leading academics. Top craftsmen have been contracted to create the new interiors. While we can't reproduce exactly what existed in the mid-16th century, we hope that any member of the Renaissance court would feel very much at home.

About the lodgings

The Queen's Outer Hall: A waiting area where people of influence would gather to conduct political business or in hope of the chance to raise issues with the queen or her leading officials. It was also where Mary de Guise would often eat, with tables

and chairs being put up while she and her guests dined, then removed to make way for dancing and entertainment.

Like the other apartments it will be entered through large, heavy wooden doors – ideal for keeping out the winter cold and deterring intruders. Heavy iron hinges, latches, studs and strong locks helped make them secure and added to their appearance. The size of the outer hall will be emphasised by the sparseness of the furniture. Two long benches of polished wood will stand against side walls – a concession to those too elderly or infirm to stand and await their audience. There will be wrought iron tripod candle standards, and a cross-shaped wooden candle bar hung from the coffered ceiling. The floor beneath will be of bare sandstone slabs.

The Queen's Inner Hall: This is where many who succeeded in being admitted to the queen's presence would have met Mary de Guise. In an age before newspapers and television this might have been the only time they heard her voice or saw what she actually looked like.

And for all but the most privileged, the chamber would have been one of the most remarkable rooms they had ever been inside. New versions of seven medieval tapestries, depicting the Hunt of the Unicorn (from the collection at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art) will hang from the walls. These are currently being hand-woven in an internationally funded project costing £2 million. The hall will also have painted wall hangings, resembling fabric, with designs based on the Guise heraldic air lions (part of the Lorraine coat of arms – three eagle-like birds).

Nobles and lairds, let alone lesser folk, would have been in awe of such an impressive display of wealth. However, the furniture will be limited. The focal point will be a low dais, covered in a large Persian rug. On top will stand the queen's X-frame chair with crimson velvet on the seat and back. Behind it will hang a brown-crimson cloth of estate, with canopy, fringed with silver thread and silver silk, in the middle of which will be a finely embroidered royal coat of arms.

The Queen's Bedchamber: Of all the chambers this will be the most impressive – the inner sanctum where Mary de Guise would have met with her closest friends and advisors. It was also here that she could sometimes relax, enjoying entertainments, and chat. The bedchamber had other uses too, as it was the area for washing and dressing – the elaborate dress of the day made changing outfits a lengthy process.

The most striking item of furniture will be the large four-poster bed with figured violet silk damask curtains, trimmed with silver and gold, and topped with finials. It will certainly look fit for a queen, but such beds were part of the elaborate symbolism of palace life – Mary de Guise would actually have slept in a snug little room nearby.

The ceiling and walls will largely be in green and gold, with fabric hangings in alternating colours as depicted in an illustration of King Christian I of Denmark at Malpaga Castle. Sumptuous carpets will cover parts of the sandstone floor and brass chandeliers will hang from the ceiling. Furniture will include a cabinet with bi-folding doors, fashioned from Scottish oak and based on one at the National Museum of Scotland. There will also be a walnut coffer of a similar design to one at the Louvre, in Paris. The fire basket will be designed for coal, which was burned in bedchambers and inner halls in preference to logs. One of the most striking and, in many respects personal, features will be the painted triptych on top of a small altar, reflecting Mary's devout Catholicism. The chamber was a place of prayer where a private chaplain would perform Mass for the queen and her confidants.

The King's Bedchamber: Each of the queen's chambers had a matching, but even grander one, for the king – as was fitting for the man who was the pinnacle of earthly power. But there is no direct evidence to prove that the king's lodgings had been completed and furnished before his death at the end of 1542 (though the king and

queen spent Easter there that year, when the palace was in an advanced state). Monarchs also moved from one residence to the next, taking a lot of furniture with them and much of the remainder would be packed away in their absence.

So here we have history as it was – no king, so very little furniture, but still an amazing amount for the visitor to take in. The sheer magnificence of the walls and ceilings featuring a painted overmantle to the fireplace showing James V's coat of arms, along with carved and painted ceiling bosses depicting the royal coat of arms and the orders of chivalry of which James was a member. A state bed will stand on a wooden dais, but without the fabrics and coverings seen on the queen's. A brass chandelier will hang from the ceiling, matched by polished fire irons in the great stone fireplace. Again, this was probably not where the king would have slept. For that he would more likely have retired to a side room, or closet, about the size of a small ship's cabin.

The King's Inner Hall: This was to have been the place where supplicants met the king – their royal master and Scotland's ruler by the right of God. Later known as the King's Presence Chamber, there will be a painted overmantle to the fireplace showing James V's coat of arms, behind the space where he intended the Cloth of Estate and throne to stand. Light will enter through large windows, beautifully detailed with stained glass heraldic devices.

Here visitors will have the chance to see one of the great glories of the lodgings. Staring down past the painted walls to the sandstone floor will be the newly created versions of the Stirling Heads. Some show kings, queens or great nobles, others are of Classical heroes or imps. The originals – most of which will be on display in a gallery on the first floor – are now bare wood. But the replica set will be richly painted, in keeping with 16th-century tastes. The heads are sometime known as Scotland's *other* crown jewels in recognition of their status as one of the finest and greatest expressions of contemporary arts and crafts.

The King's Outer Hall: This was intended as the first, and the last, part of the lodgings visitors passed through when they sought favours or justice from their king. As a place where courtiers, servants and supplicants would have mingled and waited it would have had very little furniture. And the waiting could go on for a long time – a deliberate part of the process to build up people's sense of awe about royalty. They stood and watched as the doors swung open and shut, and studied the faces of those who came through for signs of whether matters had gone well or badly. This was a place full of hopes and fears as subjects wondered what fate had in store. For some the stakes were very high indeed, they might walk out with their fortunes broken, or the ambition of a lifetime finally fulfilled.

Fine Craftsmanship

Historic Scotland is investing £1.55 million in commissioning traditional craftsmen to furnish and decorate the palace. The contracts are a valuable boost for arts and craft skills which have been practised for many centuries – some of which are now rare. The work includes the creation of furniture and fabrics through to joinery, metalwork and stained glass. The beautiful decorations, furnishings and fittings will be fundamental in recreating the splendour and luxury of a great Renaissance residence. They will provide all-important detail and atmosphere for the palace.

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