What are we doing?

Seven years ago, our conservation scientists began work on a project that imagined what it would be like to virtually recolour a tapestry and bring it back to life as part of the celebrations of Henry VIII's accession in 2009.

In 2006, Historic Royal Palaces sponsored a PhD student from the University of Manchester to undertake her doctorate on this project and one of the Abraham tapestries, *The Oath and Departure of Eliezer*, was chosen. The lining of the tapestry was removed and the reverse (which had not faded over the centuries) was photographed in great detail. The same operation was then carried out on the face of the tapestry which, after over 500 years of almost continuous permanent display, had become quite faded.

The image from the front was then digitally subtracted from that on the back; providing us with the missing elements of colour. A slide-show projection was developed with a commentary by one of our trustees, Sir Trevor McDonald. To a soundtrack of Tudor music our visitors can learn about the significance and importance of tapestries in the Tudor court, how they were designed and manufactured and how their appearance has changed over the centuries.
**Why this tapestry?**

_The Oath and Departure of Eliezer_ is one of a set of ten commissioned by Henry VIII in 1537 and first appears in the accounts for Hampton Court in 1543-44. The design is attributed to Pieter Coecke van Aelst and was woven in the workshops of Willem de Kempeneer in Brussels using wool, silk and gilt metal threads. This set of Abraham tapestries is considered to be one of the finest to survive from any period. When it was valued after the execution of Charles I in 1649 it received the highest valuation (£8,260.00) in the whole Crown art collection inventory. It was not sold but kept for Cromwell’s use and so remained in the Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace. Two other sets of Abraham tapestries survive, in Vienna and in the Royal Collection in Madrid but this is the only one that uses gold thread.

Much like photographs in the media today, Henry used imagery to promote himself. During the Reformation, after breaking with the Catholic Church, he used the subjects in his tapestries to draw parallels between himself and Old Testament patriarchs such as Abraham. With these he hoped to cement his position and establish his credibility as the head of the new Protestant Church.

_The Oath and Departure of Eliezer_ shows Abraham’s faithful servant Eliezer promising that he will go and find a suitable wife for Abraham’s son Isaac.

Another tapestry from the series _The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek_ has been returned to the Great Hall to be displayed for the first time in almost a hundred years after a decade of specialist conservation in HRP’s Conservation and Collection Care workrooms. This means that for the first time in living memory and during 2009 only, all ten tapestries can be seen at Hampton Court Palace.

**Conservation**

Guardianship is our primary aim and this exhibition has been carefully planned to ensure that it presents no risks to the tapestry. The show last for six minutes and takes place only five times a day to limit the amount of light exposure. The light itself is not white like daylight or normal electric light; single colours are projected on to localised areas which substantially reduces the risk of damage to the fibres.

Blinds have been fitted to the windows in the room and light levels will be monitored throughout.

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**Any questions?**

Just ask! During your visit, look out for our conservators around the palaces wearing their ‘Ask the Conservators’ badges. They’ll be happy to tell you about what they are doing to conserve the palaces’ collections and to answer your questions.

For further information on how we care for these beautiful buildings and objects please visit the conservation section in ‘Discover the palaces’ on our website at [www.hrp.org.uk](http://www.hrp.org.uk)

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**Who we are**

Historic Royal Palaces is the independent charity that looks after the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace and Kew Palace.

**Thank you**

We receive no funding from the government or the Crown, so your entrance ticket or membership will directly contribute to work like this. Thank you for helping us to conserve this great palace for future generations.

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This project is being carried out in partnership with the University of Manchester

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