



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Historic Royal Palaces launches appeal for South Asian WW1 objects and memories to form a new display at Hampton Court Palace

In 1919, the grounds of Hampton Court Palace played host to a large contingent of Indian soldiers taking part in the post-war Peace Celebrations. Having fought in the First World War, almost 1800 Indian Army officers, soldiers and civilian workers, stayed in a camp specially created to house them during their stay, which was one of the largest gatherings of people from India and South Asia ever assembled in Britain at the time. Now, for the first time, their contribution to the war and their visit to Hampton Court will be marked by a new display due to open at the Palace in 2023, exploring their story and experiences.

The announcement follows the successful return of the *Standing with Giants* installation in the Palace's East Front Gardens this November. Over 100 life-sized soldier silhouettes went on show including specially-commissioned ones representing the Indian soldiers who took up residence on the Hampton Court estate for both the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, and again for the First World War Victory Parade in London. The new display, opening in September 2023, will go one step further in shining a light on the encampments, including the story of the 1919 Peace Celebrations, where the soldiers set sail from India to England to take part in a commemorative parade through central London. The camp was built following instructions from the King that 'everything possible should be done for the comfort of the men.' Accommodations were made to meet the cultural and religious requirements of the soldiers, and – recognising that this was the first visit to England for the vast majority of those in attendance - the soldiers were entertained with excursions to attractions in London and across the country, including trips to the Tower of London and a Chelsea football match. The intimate display will explore the Indian soldiers experience within camp and more widely in England, with many of them visiting the country for the very first time. It will also look more widely at the South Asian presence in Britain in the early twentieth century and its impact.

While official records of the encampment and parades can be found in archives, the display also aims to explore the human stories of the soldiers who attended them and share an insight into their personal experiences. As part of this, Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) – the independent charity that cares for Hampton Court Palace – is appealing to people from the South Asian community or those who have South Asian heritage to contribute objects and memories in order to reflect the various national occasions that Indian soldiers camped at the Palace. Objects can relate to themes of World War One, the Indian army, or various royal coronations (up to and including the coronation of King George VI in 1937), encompassing anything from letters to photographs, recipes or drawings that speak to the South Asian role in these historical events. HRP are also working with local South Asian community groups, who are helping to expand the Palace's history to include stories such as the encampment. Representatives from the groups - which include A Little History of the Sikhs, who develop tours and lectures to introduce Sikh, Anglo-Sikh and Panjabi history to new audiences - will help to select objects submitted within the call out.



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Zakira Begum, Interpretation Assistant, at Historic Royal Palaces said, “We’re really excited to be shining a spotlight on the stories of the Indian soldiers encampment at Hampton Court Palace next year, celebrating the contribution that they made to the Palace’s history. Working with South Asian community groups has been a key part of bringing this story to life, and we look forward to seeing the objects people share with us to form part of the display. Having seen the emotional impact the *Standing with Giants* installation had on our visitors and the connections it created, we know that we have more work to do and look forward to exploring this story further. We encourage anyone with South Asian connections to delve into their attics and share their stories and memories of their ancestors with us, and look forward to sharing these with our visitors next September.”

Dr Tejpal Singh Ralmill, military expert at A little History of the Sikhs, said: “In 2021, and 2022, the *Standing with Giants* project has given us a platform to shine a light on the historic relationship between the Indian Army and Hampton Court Palace. This manifested in the form of presentations and tours. It was clear that our audiences were intrigued to hear of the hidden stories of our forefathers contained within the walls of the Royal Palace, and a connection that nearly all were unaware of. It is therefore pertinent that these stories are further explored. Through our research and outreach work, we have established connections with descendants of Indian soldiers who resided in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace in the first half of the twentieth century at historic events such as Coronations. We look forward to developing upon this research and supporting the team at Historic Royal Palaces to interpret submission from our community to the call-out and working on the display at the Hampton Court Palace in 2023.”

For more details on how to contribute an object for consideration for display, please visit www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/indian-soldiers-exhibition-object-call

Entries close on 01 January 2023. Full terms and conditions for submissions, as well as consent to share information, can be found on the webpage above.

Notes to Editors

For further information and images please contact Sophie Lemagnen in the Historic Royal Palaces Press Office via press@hrp.org.uk / 020 3166 6166

Historic Royal Palaces is a team of people who love and look after six of the most wonderful palaces in the world. We create space for spirits to stir and be stirred. We want everyone to feel welcome and accepted. We tell stories about the monarchs you know and the lives you don’t. We let people explore and we set minds racing. We are a charity and your support gives the palaces a future, for everyone.

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