

2004

# Practical Conservation Guidelines for Successful Hospitality Events in Historic Houses



ENGLISH HERITAGE

In seeking to make historic houses economically sustainable, many owners and managers are now using them to stage commercial hospitality events. The pressures of such events on fragile historic interiors can be enormous. English Heritage, which exists to promote the care and understanding of the historic environment, has produced this publication to give

practical guidance on the management of such events. In offering a historic house as a hospitality venue, loans, insurance and any statutory responsibilities should be considered at the outset. The following guidelines are set out as a checklist and are intended to help prevent damage to historic interiors and collections during the course of such events.



*The dining room, Eltham Palace. [J990118]*

## I WHAT TYPE OF EVENT?

- 1.1 Decide which events to accept. Some may be particularly risky because of the potential for physical damage to interiors or damage to your organisation's reputation; it may be necessary to refuse these types of events.
- 1.2 Only offer clients a limited number of event scenarios. These well-rehearsed scenarios should have been fully assessed for all potential risks involved. The rooms and their set-ups; access points and through routes for contractors; required levels of supervision, etc should all be written down as part of a formalised operational document agreed between house staff and contractors.
- 1.3 Events requested outside agreed scenarios should be subject to a detailed risk assessment prior to further progression of an event enquiry. The risk assessment should involve, and be agreed by, all 'stakeholders' on the property, including the curator, conservator, event manager and operations manager.

## 2 HOW MANY EVENTS?

- 2.1 Decide on a sustainable number of events per year. This should take into account additional wear and tear to vulnerable historic interiors and increased light exposure to the collections. Staff resources are also important factors to consider.

## 3 HOW MANY PEOPLE?

- 3.1 Decide on the maximum number of guests for each event scenario. This will depend largely on fire evacuation requirements. However, you should also take the following into account: the comfort of your guests; the potential risk of damage to vulnerable objects and surfaces at bottlenecks and in over-crowded areas; and the possible impact



*The Green Velvet Room, Chiswick House. [K020537]*

of fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature on objects on open display.

## 4 CHOICE OF CONTRACTOR

- 4.1 Ask your clients to choose from a small number of contractors (eg caterers, lighting and marquee companies). This will enable you to build up a good relationship with the contractors and they will become familiar with your property and how events operate there. Risk assessments and method statements for key scenarios should be required from these contractors. If a client requests the use of a supplier not on your approved list, ensure you have a system in place that allows you to be confident of their credentials (eg references from other historic house hospitality venues). If the request is for a new caterer, ask for references from houses without in-house kitchen facilities if you require them to work from 'field' or temporary kitchens.
- 4.2 Ensure that each contractor on your list conforms to current health and safety requirements, particularly food hygiene. Also ensure they have appropriate insurance and can demonstrate safe working practices.
- 4.3 Ensure that the supplier signs a contract. This should confirm that contractors agree to abide by the terms, conditions and restrictions on the property.
- 4.4 Each contractor should visit your site prior to the day of the event. This is to ensure that they are familiar with the requirements of that particular event.
- 4.5 Ensure your approved suppliers know that they are responsible for the activities of any subcontractors they may use.
- 4.6 Organise training sessions for approved contractors on methods of working at the property. This will enable them to become familiar with the venue.
- 4.7 Continually monitor and annually review your approved suppliers list. Have procedures in place to remove suppliers from your list if there are indications that they are not performing to the required standard.



*The kitchen used for food preparation at Eltham Palace. [© Nicky Ingram]*

## 5 SITE ACCESS FOR SUPPLIERS

- 5.1 Specify the access route(s) to be taken by contractors' vehicles. Otherwise damage could occur to paths, bridges and lawns.
- 5.2 Ensure contractors know what speed limits and height, width or weight restrictions apply. If vehicles are driving through an area with public access (eg a park), request the use of hazard lights and restrict the speed of the vehicle. At night or in low light levels contractors should be wearing high visibility jackets when outside their vehicles.
- 5.3 Specify delivery times for equipment, food, flowers, etc.
- 5.4 Specify access points into the building.
- 5.5 Designate a parking area for vehicles. This should be away from emergency exits and not obstruct emergency vehicle access. Ideally the parking area should be out of view of the public. If possible vehicles should be unloaded and then parked off-site.
- 5.6 All doors should be manned when deliveries are being made and collected. Never allow doors to be wedged open and left unattended at any time; this is a breach of security. Open external doors will also hamper proper environmental control within the building.

## 6 ACCESS THROUGH THE BUILDING WITH EQUIPMENT, EVENT FURNITURE, ETC

- 6.1 Make sure suppliers have adequate lighting. However, they should be made aware of the importance of limiting light exposure wherever possible to avoid the risk of irreversible damage to organic objects.
- 6.2 Define allowed routes around the property for contractors. Ensure access to other areas is restricted by the use of local alarms, locks or staff supervision.
- 6.3 Adequate protection for walls, door cases and floors is needed. This is to protect vulnerable surfaces from equipment, event furniture, etc moved by suppliers.
- 6.4 Specify the maximum number of chairs and tables that can be moved through the property at a time. The number will be dependent on the layout and vulnerability of your property; ideally only 6–8 stacking function chairs or 1 table should be moved at a time.
- 6.5 Specify the maximum size of event furniture that may be moved. Items more than 1.25m in any dimension should be carried one at a time and by two people. Large or bulky items should be broken down into manageable parts where possible.
- 6.6 Specify how event furniture is to be moved. Ensure contractors' staff walk rather than run when carrying equipment. Circular tables should be carried and not rolled, especially if the rim is metal. Equipment should be carried below shoulder level and must be carried rather than dragged upstairs. Doors should be opened and closed carefully.
- 6.7 Specify the type of equipment to be used. Request trolleys with pneumatic rather than solid tyres. Equipment should have rubber-tipped feet or be placed on protective boards. It may be preferable

to invest in your own set of event chairs and tables.

- 6.8 Ensure equipment is properly stored or stacked. No equipment should be leant against historic objects and surfaces. Protect historic floors before equipment is stacked and keep equipment at least 1m away from objects or walls. Define an area for the storage of equipment remaining on site during the event.



*Chairs stacked in the saloon at Chiswick House. [© Nicky Ingram]*

## 7 SUPPLIERS' PERSONNEL

- 7.1 Request the use of staff who are already familiar with the property.
- 7.2 Know who is on your site. Ensure all contractors are identifiable. Provide or request name badges and obtain details of vehicles parking on the property (registration number and type).
- 7.3 Ask personnel to sign in and out. This is for security and emergency evacuation purposes.
- 7.4 Provide briefings for contractors' personnel on their arrival at the site. Suppliers need to be able to identify who is in overall charge on site for the event, who has the authority to stop them working and any other details necessary for the smooth running of the function.
- 7.5 Check that personnel working on-site are appropriately qualified to do so. For instance, do they have relevant certificates (eg for erecting or dismantling scaffolds) or, if electricians, are they IEE registered?

7.6 Define a rest area and changing room (if appropriate) for contractors' staff. This should include areas where they can eat, drink and safely leave their belongings. There should also be the means to provide some additional warmth if the event is taking place in the early or late part of the year. Accidents and spillages will more easily happen if serving staff are cold. Designate an area, ideally outside, where they can smoke. By not doing this you risk damage to objects by contractors eating, drinking or smoking in vulnerable areas.



Setting up in the Italian Drawing Room at Eltham Palace. [© Nicky Ingram]

set-up or roped off. Continual handling of fragile objects, particularly gilded furniture, can cause more damage than simply roping them off *in situ*.

8.5 Agree locations for the bar, buffet table and any coat racks as part of your set scenarios. These should be sited at least 1m away from any historic object or surface and stable enough for their intended purpose. Provide sufficient coat racks to ensure they do not get overloaded.

8.6 Ensure adequate space between tables. There should be a 1m clearance around a table for drawn out chairs. Sufficient space is also needed to ensure waiting staff can easily circulate between tables. This will help avoid spillages while serving food to guests.

8.7 Electrical equipment brought onto the property should have a current Portable Appliance Test (PAT) certificate. Proof should be provided. Check that suppliers' power requirements do not overload the property's capacity.

8.8 Contractors should not unplug any property equipment. Also, where electrical sockets are in inaccessible places (eg under tables), property staff – rather than contractors – should plug and unplug temporary electrical installations.

8.9 Ensure cable protectors are used. Where this is not possible the cables should be laid around the perimeter of the room to minimise possible trip hazards. Never stick cables down with gaffer, or similar, tape (see 10.5).

8.10 If the client requests additional heating this should be of an approved type. Avoid forced air heating. Additional heating should not compromise environmental control in the property. The quantity and location of additional heating should be agreed in advance.

8.11 The site should be left clean and tidy. All rubbish, especially food and floral debris, must be removed from the site immediately after the event to avoid the possibility of pest infestation. Tear-resistant bags should be used to remove debris.

## 8 EVENT SET-UP AND TAKE-DOWN

8.1 Ensure there is adequate time for the set-up or take-down. Accidents will happen if contractors are rushed or tired. Event areas should be clear of the public prior to set-up.

8.2 Ensure suppliers report accidents and damage as soon as they occur. This is both to try and mop up a spillage as soon as it occurs, but also to allocate responsibility for the damage.

8.3 No signage should be erected without prior permission. Nothing should be physically attached to any historic surface.

8.4 Contractors should not move any historic object. This should only be done by appropriately trained property staff. An assessment needs to be made by staff as to whether historic objects should be moved as part of the event

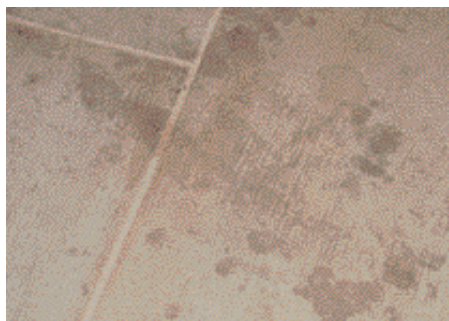


Here, furniture in the entrance hall at Eltham Palace has been cleared and the room set up for a wedding ceremony. [© Nicky Ingram]



## 9 SUPERVISION

- 9.1 Ensure there are adequate trained staff to manage a hospitality programme. At the start of the year, determine the sustainable volume of events that can be held at your venue and ensure sufficient resources are available to meet it. Running events back-to-back with limited staff affects their vigilance.
- 9.2 There should be sufficient staff on duty for each event based on your risk assessment and any security considerations. Ensure there are enough well-trained staff who are knowledgeable about the property and how hospitality events operate on site. If agency staff are needed, aim for a ratio of 2:1 in favour of property staff. All staff should be clear in their role and level of responsibility.
- 9.3 There should be at least one member of staff supervising in each area where activity is taking place. Staff should be in verbal or radio contact with each other at all times.
- 9.4 Ensure all staff know the correct procedures to follow if faced with verbal or physical abuse from drunk guests. Such situations should not be allowed to escalate as there is a real risk to personal safety as well as the safety of contents.
- 9.5 Deal with spillages quickly. 'Spillage kits' should be on hand to ensure a wide range of spills can be mopped up quickly. Staff need to know how to tackle different types of spillages and when to call in professional conservation help.



Staining on a historic floor.  
[©Nicky Ingram]

- 9.6 Implement a thorough cleaning and pest management strategy. Events impact on the normal cleaning regime of properties. Pest infestation is a real risk if proper housekeeping is neglected.

## 10 PROTECTION

- 10.1 Identify those surfaces that need protection. These will mainly consist of the following: surfaces where glasses may be put down (eg sculpture plinths, mantelpieces, table tops); floors under bars; low-hung paintings, which may need to be glazed; historic wall surfaces and floors in food preparation areas; and vulnerable areas on access routes used by suppliers.
- 10.2 Agree who is responsible for protection. Will property staff or contractors undertake protection? Ideally this responsibility should fall to property staff.
- 10.3 Use appropriate protection; signage asking guests not to touch or put glasses on historic surfaces will not deter everyone. In 'front of house' areas protection needs to be visually acceptable. Use Perspex sheets, which have been cut to size, for surfaces where glasses could be left. This is relatively unobtrusive and easy to move. Felt or cork pads under the Perspex will further protect fragile surfaces. On conservation advice, a protective layer of wax could be used to protect polished wood surfaces instead of Perspex. Protect vulnerable floors with sacrificial carpets or floor cloths, ensuring spills are mopped up



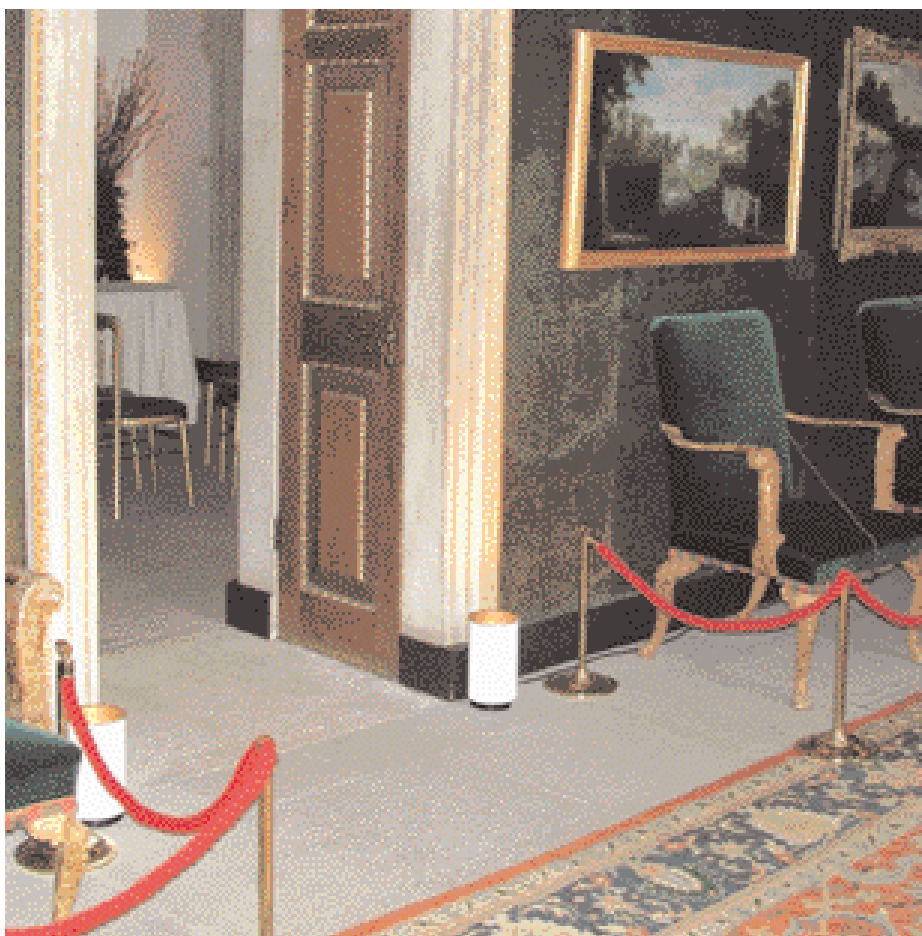
Protection for the flower preparations in the screens passage at Eltham Palace. [©Nicky Ingram]

before they penetrate through the carpet. Keep guests away from fragile pieces of furniture by using ropes and stanchions. These need to be a sufficient distance away from the objects they are protecting to prevent damage if they are knocked. Protection can be more utilitarian in 'behind the scenes' areas. It needs to be strong but light and easy to manoeuvre. If the protective element is to remain *in situ*, it should also be fire retardant. Correx and Megafilm are useful materials, the former is impact resistant and the latter is used for druggeting. Waterproof druggetts must be used in all areas where food preparation, cooking and clearing takes place.

- 10.4 Ensure the protection is big enough. Druggetts should be at least 1m larger all round than any working area (eg the serving area behind the bar).
- 10.5 Only use low-tack tape for fixing down protection. Gaffer and other similar tapes will leave adhesive residues on marble and remove paint from skirtings and other areas. The type of tape should be approved in advance by a conservator. Druggetting that isn't fixed can become a trip hazard.
- 10.6 Provide appropriate non-slip mats at all entrance and exit points. This is to ensure that the levels of dust, grit, etc inside the building are kept down.
- 10.7 Use heatproof covers on tables. If it is unavoidable to use a historic surface for standing hot dishes, ensure a heatproof cover is put on under the tablecloth.



Marks left from the removal of tape attaching druggetting to the floor. [©Nicky Ingram]



Ropes and stanchions are set up for an evening event to protect the pictures and gilt frame chairs in the Green Velvet Room, Chiswick House. [© Nicky Ingram]

## 12 FOOD AND DRINK

12.1 Food and drink should only be prepared and consumed in designated areas. Owners of loan objects in function areas need to be aware that events are taking place and to agree to their objects remaining *in situ*. Objects indemnified under the Government Indemnity Scheme should not normally be in areas where food or drink is prepared and served (see MGC 1999). Food preparation is a source of humidity and pollution; therefore extraction should be used wherever possible in designated kitchen areas.

12.2 Approve each menu in advance. Red wine, tea, coffee, staining drinks and juices should only be served at seated functions. Only allow clear, non-staining beverages at drinks receptions (ie champagne, white wine and water). Avoid greasy and strong smelling food. Avoid soft fillings and highly coloured food. Loose berries and soft fruit should not be used in canapés. Don't allow deep-fat frying.

12.3 Provide sufficient occasional tables for glasses. These should be positioned away from historic objects and surfaces so that glasses, if knocked over, will not cause damage.

12.4 The use of steam irons for smoothing tablecloths should not be allowed.

12.5 Naked flames should not be used to cook food. Steam producing equipment, including kettles and urns, should not be used in historic areas. Fire safety and environmental control are concerns.

12.6 Ensure staff take care when serving and clearing food and drink. Dregs buckets should not be more than half full at any time. Ice bins should not be emptied in garden foliage. Plated food should only be taken two at a time. Ideally drinks should only be served from trays carried by waiters. If waiters top up glasses from

## 11 FIRE SAFETY

11.1 Are candles to be allowed at events? Candles are a fire hazard; they also produce smoke and their wax can stain surfaces. Fire alarm systems might be activated by the use of candles. If candles must be used, smokeless candles or candles enclosed in glass containers are preferable. Battery candles are also an option.

11.2 Is smoking allowed? Not only is smoking a fire hazard but there are also environmental issues: 'Smoking introduces minute particles and volatiles into the indoor air which can react with the surface of objects on open display' (Cassar 1999b). Ensure guests and suppliers' staff know where smoking is allowed. If guests are found smoking in inappropriate areas in the house, caterers should have a supply of closed ashtrays to hand to extinguish the cigarette or cigar.

11.3 Are open fires to be used? Extra fire precautions should be in place and ideally fires should only be lit where chimney flues have been lined. Because of environmental concerns do not put vulnerable objects above or in front of lighted fires.

11.4 Ensure all fire exits are clearly identified. These should be kept clear of any obstructions. Additional fire exits may be required for events. Seek advice from your local fire service.

11.5 Ensure you provide adequate and appropriate fire extinguishers and fire blankets. All should have been checked in the last 12 months and staff trained in their use.

11.6 Ensure all staff are trained in emergency fire drills, including event scenarios.

bottles the bottles should have napkins wrapped round the necks to catch drips.

- 12.7 Designate an area where champagne and sparkling wine can be uncorked without risk to historic collections and interiors.
- 12.8 To reduce the risk of damage to historic interiors from food and drink, encourage receptions to take place outside wherever possible.



*Caterers setting up for an event in the Great Hall, Eltham Palace. [© Nicky Ingram]*

## 13 MARQUEES

- 13.1 Ensure you have all relevant permissions in place (eg planning consent, listed building consent) if required before erecting a marquee.
- 13.2 Marquees and awnings should not be attached in any way to the historic building fabric. Keep them at least 1m away.
- 13.3 Marquees should be erected and dismantled in a safe manner. The site must be roped off with poles and hazard tape while work is taking place. If the erection/dismantling takes place over a number of days the site must be left safe at the end of each day. Garden statuary and urns must be well-protected (eg by boxing in) while marquees are being erected and dismantled.
- 13.4 No pegging, staking or drilling should be allowed in historic gardens. Hard flooring should be used to protect vulnerable lawns.

## 14 LIGHTING, MUSIC, STAGING COMPANIES AND FIREWORKS

- 14.1 Ensure lighting is acceptable. Cool lights, filtered for ultraviolet radiation, should be used. Extreme care should be taken when positioning lights. Keep well away from combustible and fragile surfaces.
- 14.2 Ensure any interior and exterior lighting is secure and stable. Any rigging should be secure and lamps, etc should be stable. Historic floors should be protected from possible damage from the feet of equipment. External gas flambeaux need to be supervised and kept well away from combustible material, especially marquees.
- 14.3 Sufficient exterior lighting should be provided to allow suppliers to work and guests and staff to leave safely.
- 14.4 Control noise levels carefully. Objects could be at risk if noise vibration levels are high. A 70W system has been shown to damage paintings in the same room (W Wei (Instituut Collectie Nederland), pers comm to D Thickett). Local community relations can also be affected by noisy functions. Testing of sound levels

should be minimised. The presence of the public should be borne in mind when testing. Amplified music should be discouraged. Some alarm systems are sensitive to vibration.

- 14.5 Be careful in the positioning of musicians and heavy musical instruments. For example, pianos should not be moved once positioned. Wheels can scratch fragile floors if a piano is dragged. Musicians and instruments, especially string quartets need to be positioned well away from objects and fragile surfaces. Rubber caps should be used on the spikes of double basses, etc.
- 14.6 Ensure temporary dance floors and staging have good protection underneath to avoid damage to historic floors. Vibrations from dancing can cause damage. Some types of dancing (eg discos) may not be appropriate within historic interiors.
- 14.7 Ideally any structures should be fully built off-site and only assembled on-site.
- 14.8 Ensure companies comply with relevant regulations in respect of storage, transport and firing of fireworks (see HSE 1999).



*Marquee at St Mawes Castle.*





*Lighting too close to a floral arrangement. [© Nicky Ingram]*

## 15 FILMING AND PHOTOGRAPHY AT HOSPITALITY EVENTS

(SEE HUDSON 1995 AND NATIONAL TRUST 1998)

- 15.1 The location of any professional filming or photography should be agreed in advance with property staff. Restrict the number of photographers on-site and state that equipment should be kept to a minimum. Do not allow the filming or photography of any individual paintings, furniture, etc.
- 15.2 A member of property staff should be in attendance at all times. Light, UV and the heat generated by lights should be checked regularly.



## 16 FLOWERS

- 16.1 Agree the location of arrangements in advance. Arrangements should not lean against historic surfaces. They should be inspected by an appropriate member of property staff.
- 16.2 Encourage as much of the flower arranging as possible to take place off-site. For floral arrangements created off-site, ensure that the dimensions of the arrangement allow safe access into and through the building. Also ensure that the arrangement is stable enough to be transported easily.
- 16.3 Ensure waterproof druggets protect the floor where arranging does take place on-site. The drugget should not be taped to the floor unless by prior agreement.
- 16.4 Arrangements on historic surfaces should be in oasis to minimise the need for water. Misting or spraying of arrangements should not be allowed. Watering of flowers on-site should be kept to a minimum and a long-spouted plastic watering can should be used.
- 16.5 Specify what containers can be used. These should be made of plastic or wood (not metal) to prevent scraping or staining of surfaces. Wood containers, however, could be a vehicle for pests. They should be waterproof or have a waterproof liner. Ensure the base of any vase is wide enough to prevent tipping.
- 16.6 Limit the height of floral displays. Displays should be stable and not come into contact with any historic surface.
- 16.7 On historic surfaces further protection under the container should be used (eg glass or Perspex). This protection should be larger than the overall dimension of the arrangement. Ensure the glass is kept off the surface with cork or felt circles.
- 16.8 If possible flowers should be inspected for insect pests before coming into the property.
- 16.9 Specify the type of flowers, foliage and fruit that should not be used in historic house arrangements. Geraniums and peonies should not be used as their petals can stain stone. Berries, grapes and soft fruit should not be used in arrangements. Lilies and other flowers with staining pollen should have their stamens removed off-site. Do not use flowers that weep or foliage that can scratch historic objects or surfaces. Spray-painted foliage or other loosely adhering decoration should not be used.
- 16.10 All flowers should be removed within 24 hours of the end of an event.
- 16.11 Discourage the use of growing plants as there is a high risk of insect pest infestation. Any potted plants should be in sterile soil; however, this is difficult to check so if in doubt do not allow the plant to be used.

*Watermark from Christmas tree pot. [© Nicky Ingram]*

## 17 THE CLIENT AND GUESTS

- 17.1 Ensure you know who you need to liaise with on the day. This may be the client or their representative. Ideally it will be the person who has met with you and planned the event.
- 17.2 The client and suppliers must be made aware that the venue's main representative on the day has the authority to stop the function and in what circumstances they are able to do this.
- 17.3 Ensure guests and contractors are aware of and follow footwear rules. Sharp-heeled shoes can damage some floor surfaces. You may wish to provide heel protectors.
- 17.4 Ensure that guests and clients know the rules on smoking. If they understand why the restrictions are in place, they will be more likely to adhere to them.
- 17.5 What facilities are available for small children attending functions? Consider providing approved crèche or nannying facilities and entertainment.
- 17.6 Confetti should not be allowed at weddings. This can stain historic floors if wet. Fresh flower petals may be an option outside.
- 17.7 Try to stagger the arrival time of coaches to avoid overcrowding in entrance areas.

## 18 MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 18.1 Regularly review how hospitality events operate on the property.
- 18.2 Review suppliers' performance at least annually (see 4.7).
- 18.3 Use a safety checklist to ensure that all necessary protection, etc is in place prior to the start of an event.
- 18.4 Record and photograph any damage that occurs during functions.
- 18.5 Monitor the environment during events to assess any detrimental effect functions might have.
- 18.6 Monitor guest flow during events – identify pinch points and areas that get crowded or to which guests naturally gravitate. Move or protect objects in these areas before events as appropriate.
- 18.7 Monitor the effectiveness of management procedures and protection by regularly checking objects.
- 18.8 Ensure inspection report forms are completed after each event and before reopening to the public.



*Flower display in the Great Hall, Eltham Palace.*  
[© Nicky Ingram]





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