

# Visitor Responses to Conservation of Historic Interiors

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# Introduction

- Management of conservation/housekeeping is individual properties influenced by local interpretation/presentation
- Examples –
  - Faded grandeur of estates/houses in decline – Chastleton, Calke Abbey
  - Glittering polished style of estates/houses at their peak – Polesden Lacey



# Impact of property interpretation on conservation management

- Presentation standards
- Cleaning/dust-removal
- Balancing risks of dust removal (abrasion/loss of original material, loss of patina) Vs. risks of leaving dust intact (cementation, sign of neglect, biological damage)
- **How does it impact on the visitor experience?**



# Visitor perceptions

## ■ Managing perceptions

- historicity perceived via dust or cleaning levels

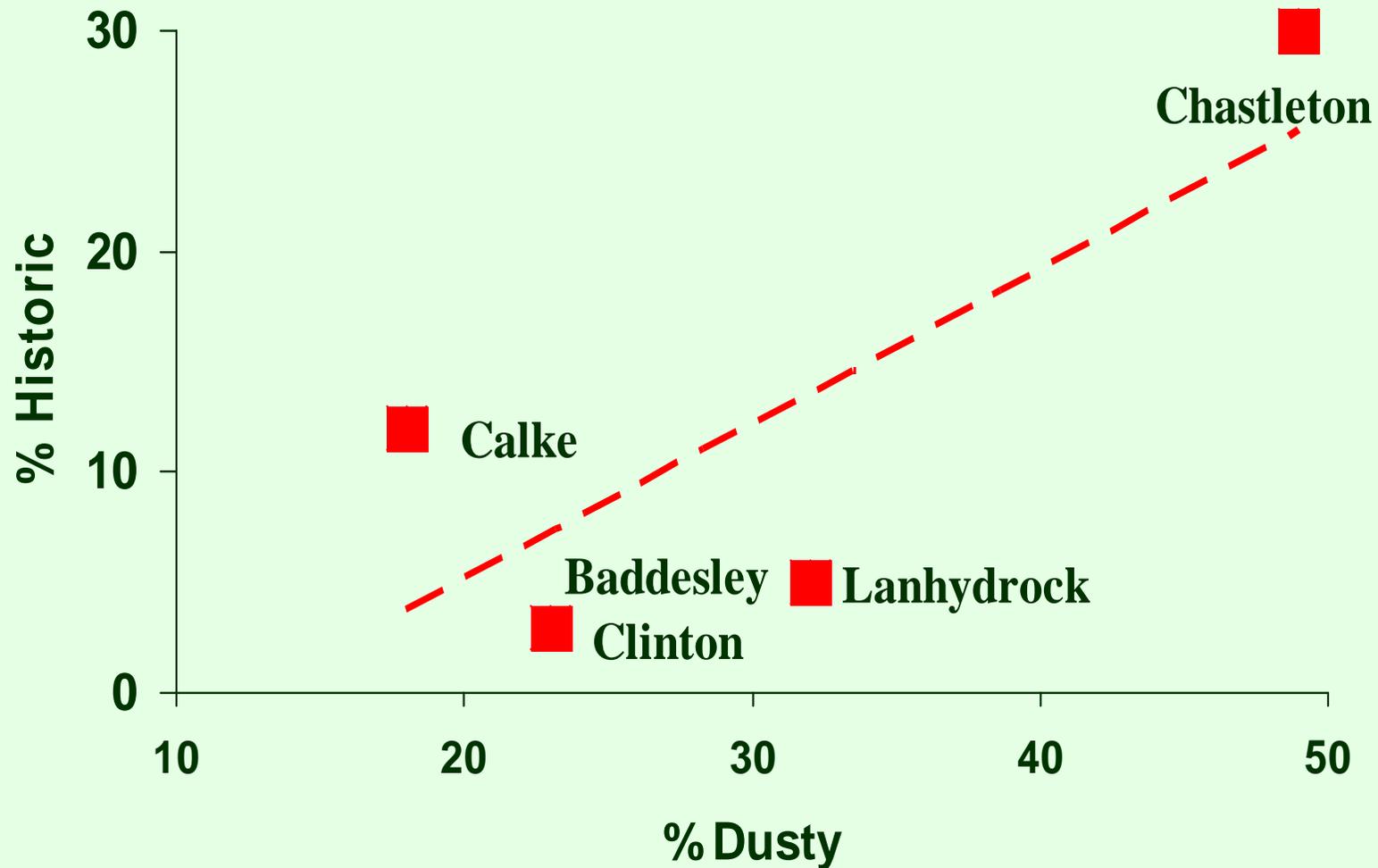


## ■ Contradictions

- although dustiness may be perceived as a historic patina, yet simultaneously provoke a call for more cleaning



# Dust, patina and historicity





Part 1 – Unsolicited visitor  
comment cards

# Unsolicited comments

- Analysis of visitor comment cards from 6 NT properties (Chastleton House, Calke Abbey, Uppark, Polesden Lacey, Ham House, Osterley Park) and 2 HRP properties (Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace)
- Visitors free to comment on any aspect of their visit, relatively few chose to talk about presentation or conservation

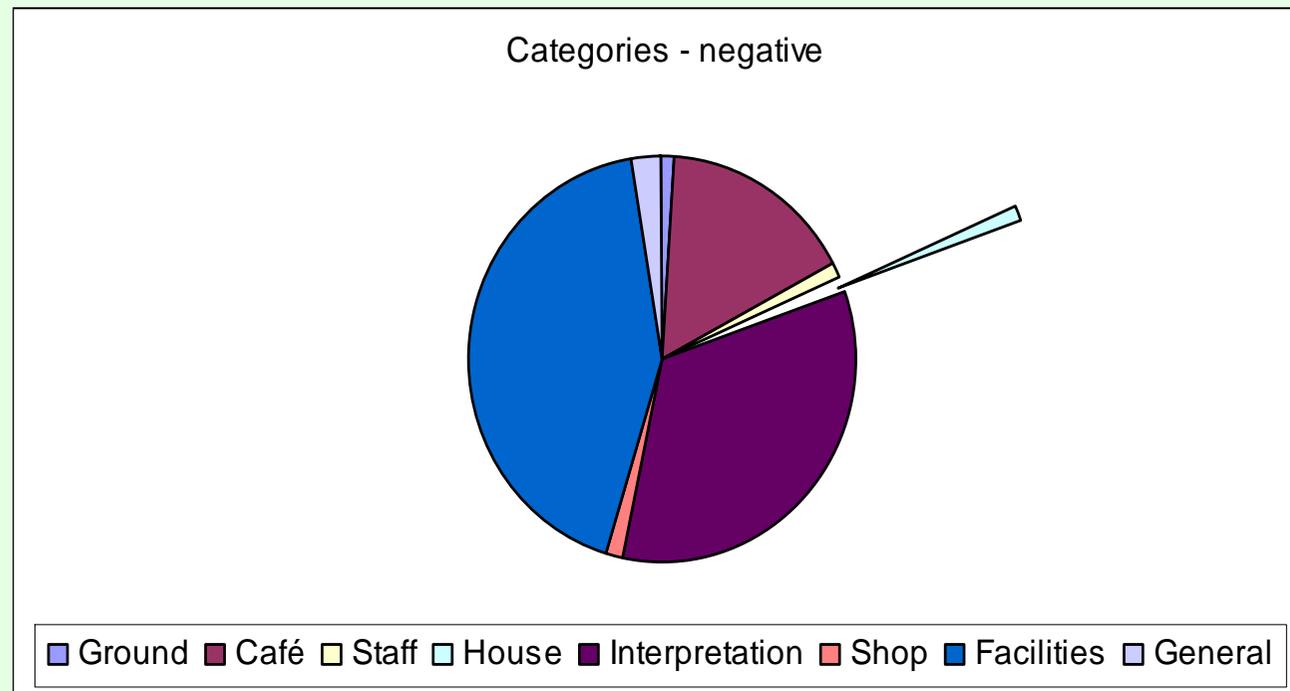
# Analysis of visitor comments

- Comments grouped into 6 categories.
  - Grounds
  - Staff
  - House
  - Interpretation
  - Facilities
  - General
- Categories separated into negative and positive comments



# Results 1 – unsolicited comments

- % of visitors choosing to comment on housekeeping-related issues
- e.g. Polesden Lacey (glittery, sparkling), few criticisms



# Unsolicited comments – extracts (Polesden Lacey)

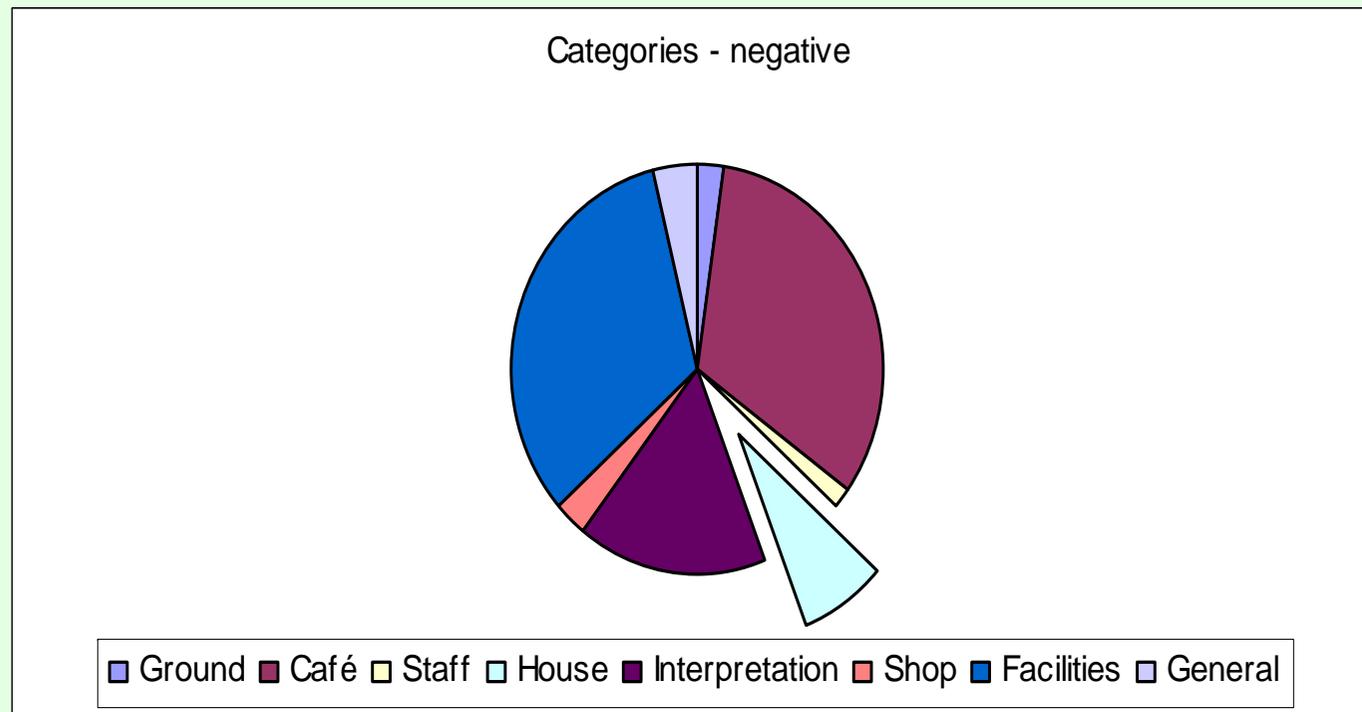
“The presentation of  
the house...excellent  
– it is so well  
maintained”

““What a lovely  
house and so  
well cared for!”



# Results 1 – unsolicited comments

- % of visitors choosing to comment on housekeeping-related issues,
- e.g. Calke Abbey (time capsule) – higher proportion of criticisms)



# Unsolicited comments – extracts (Calke Abbey)

“Excellent – leaving the house  
“as it was” with minimal  
restoration provides a real  
atmosphere of the past.  
Probably the most interesting of  
all the NT houses we have ever  
visited.”

“A lovely ‘time  
capsule’  
experience.”

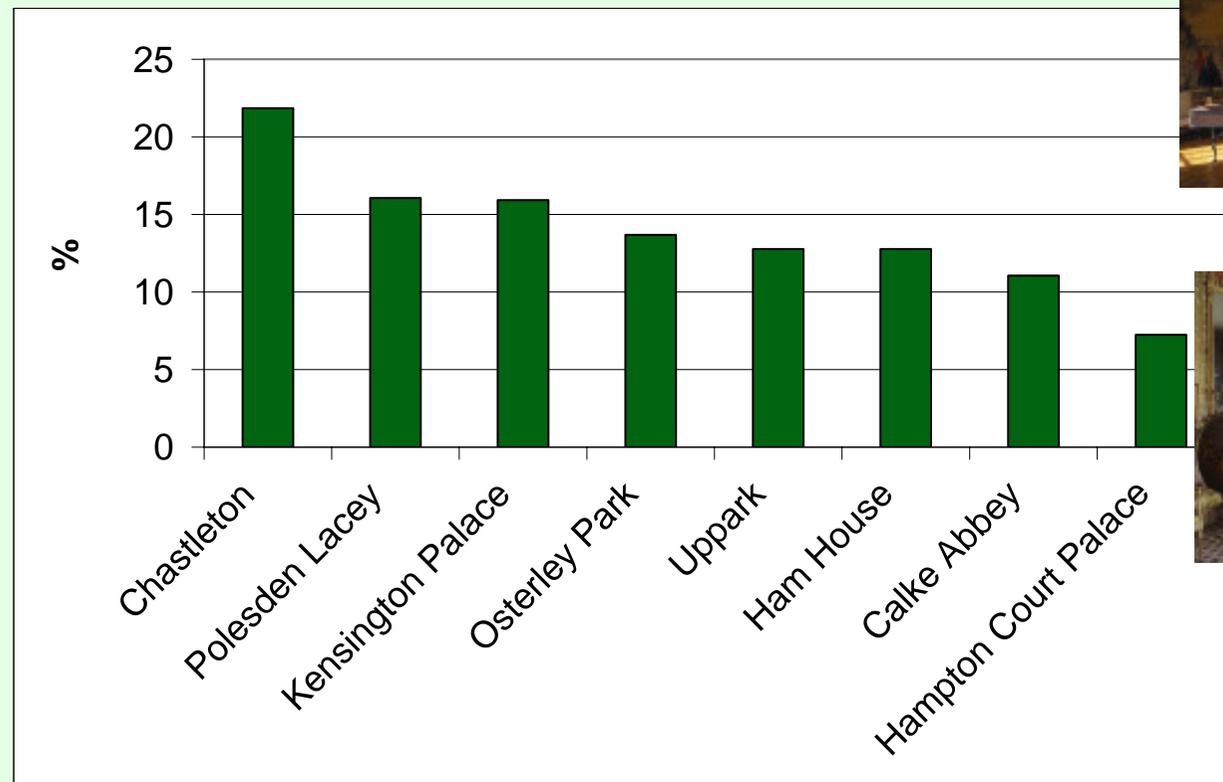
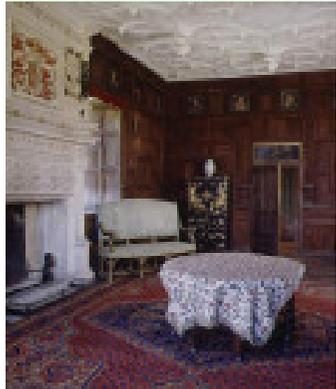
“It was grim  
and  
depressing.”

It’s sad to see  
so many rooms  
in disrepair.”



# Results 1 – unsolicited comments

- How many comments are related to housekeeping as a % of all comments?



# Unsolicited comments – extracts (Chastleton)



“Please help protect the beautiful fabric...[it] is being ruined by dust...”



“Thank you for preserving it the way it has always been”



“We love the atmosphere and the dusty musty rambling rooms!”



“Perhaps a little bit of dust removal might be employed”



# Unsolicited comments – extracts (Kensington Palace)

“Beautifully preserved.”

“Very nicely restored collection, some are more than 400 years old, which surprised me.”

“Some parts were very dusty”

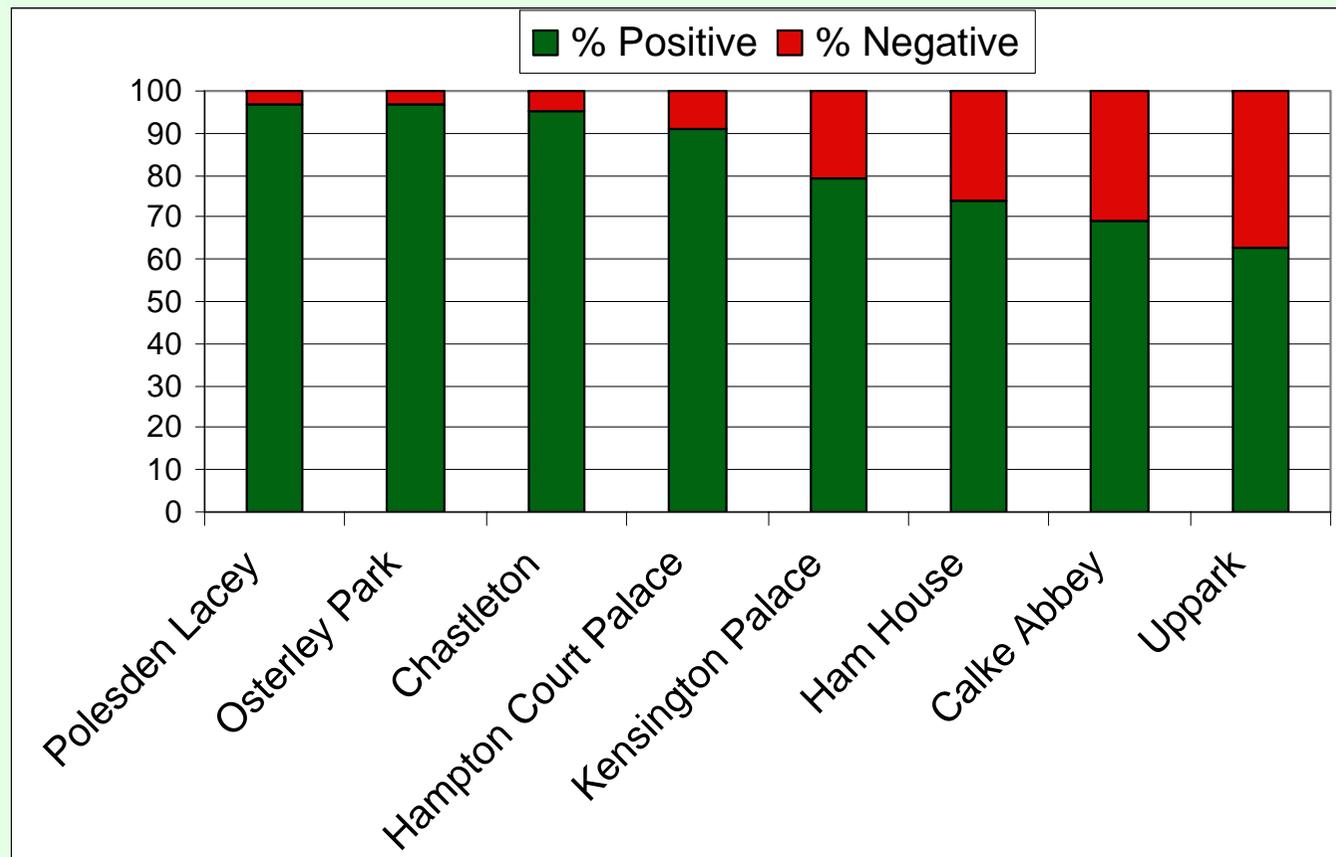


“Nice but too dirty for my wife’s allergies.”



# Results 1 – unsolicited comments

- What % of all housekeeping comments were positive or negative?



# Discussion

- The properties where housekeeping standards are more clearly influenced by the presentation scheme received the most comments, whether the property was more dusty, or more polished.
- Visitors discern this – and were compelled to comment!



## Part 2 – Market research

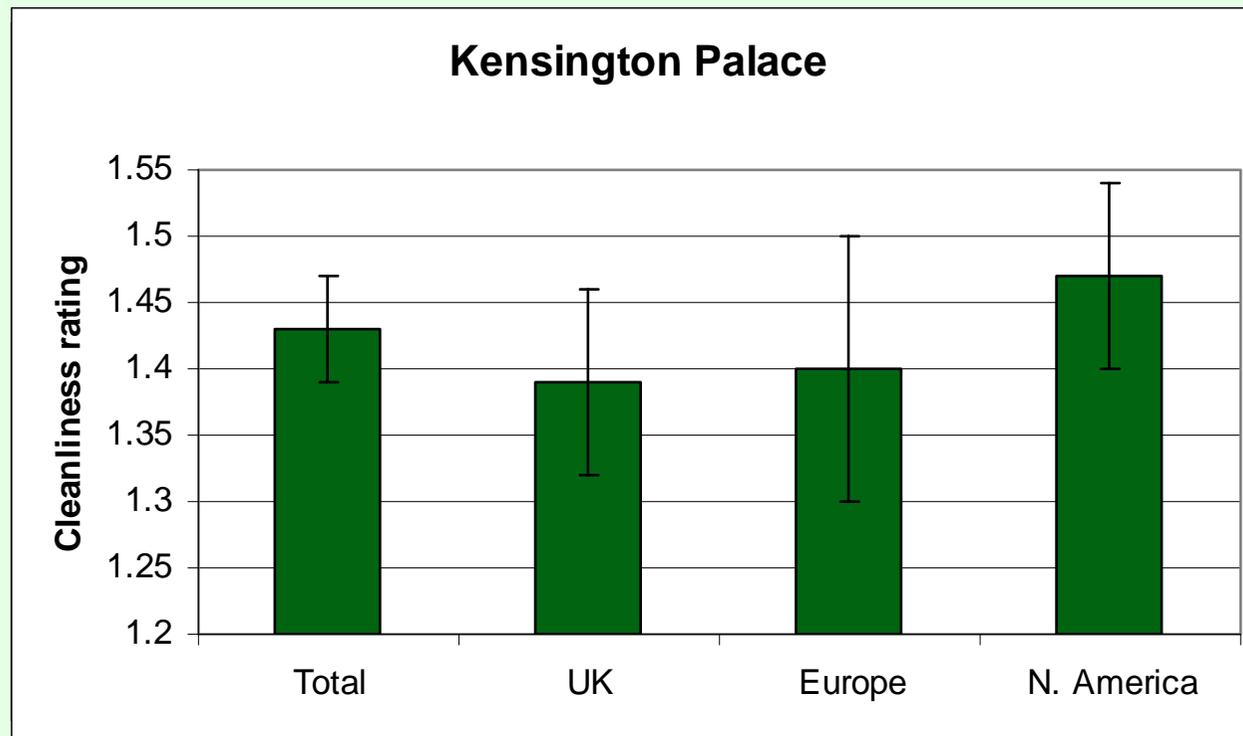
# Method 2: Market research

- HRP only (Kensington Palace and Hampton Court Palace)
- Part of annual corporate market research into all aspects of visitor experience at the properties.



## Results 2: Market research Cleanliness and condition ratings (2005)

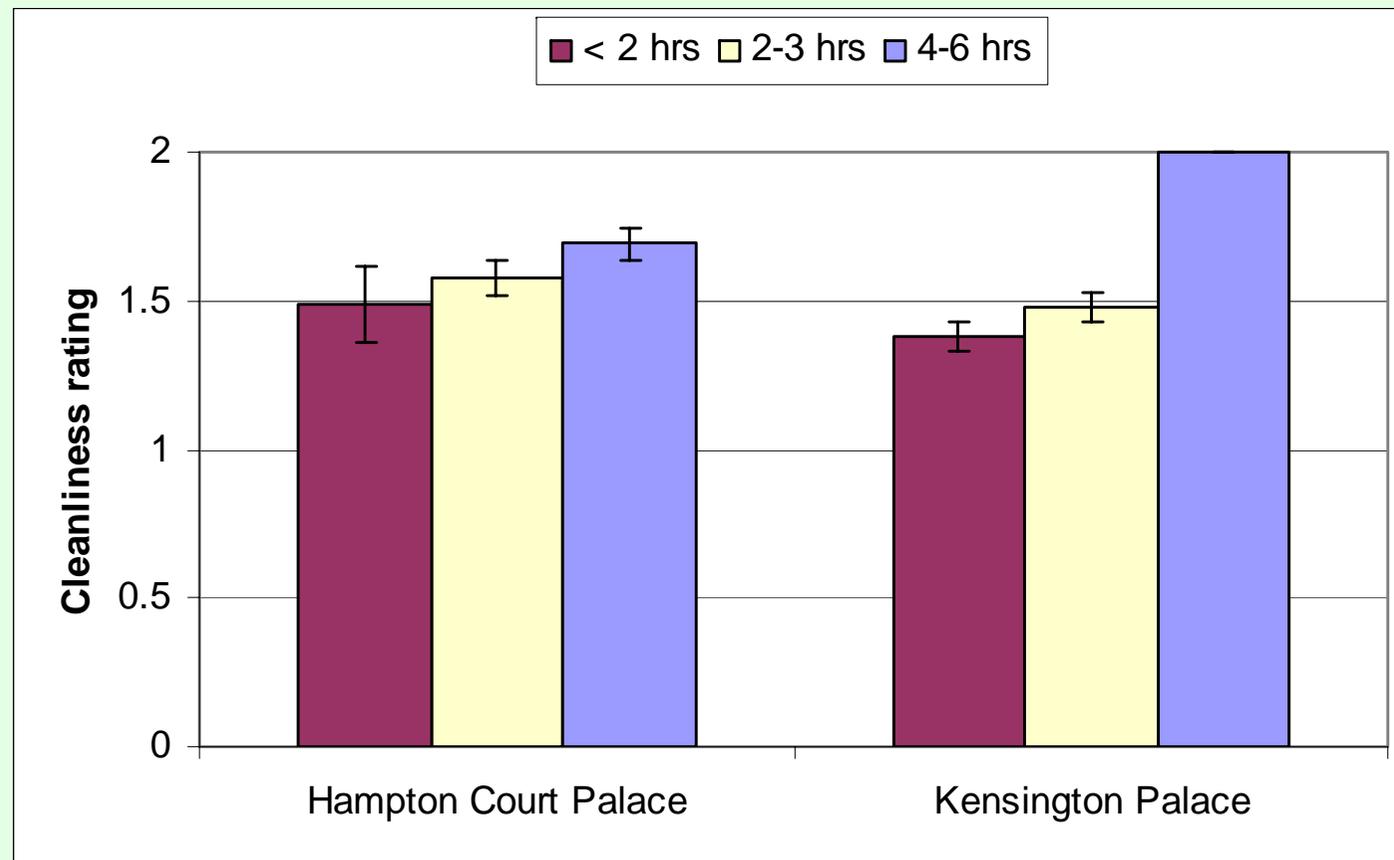
- Hampton Court Palace rating averages
- Kensington Palace rating averages



# Market research - discussion

- UK visitors rated lowest levels of cleanliness/condition, European visitors rate similarly to UK, and N.America visitors rate highest levels of cleanliness/condition.
- “Newer” palace rated as less “clean” than old palace

# Length of visit as a factor in Cleanliness/Condition rating



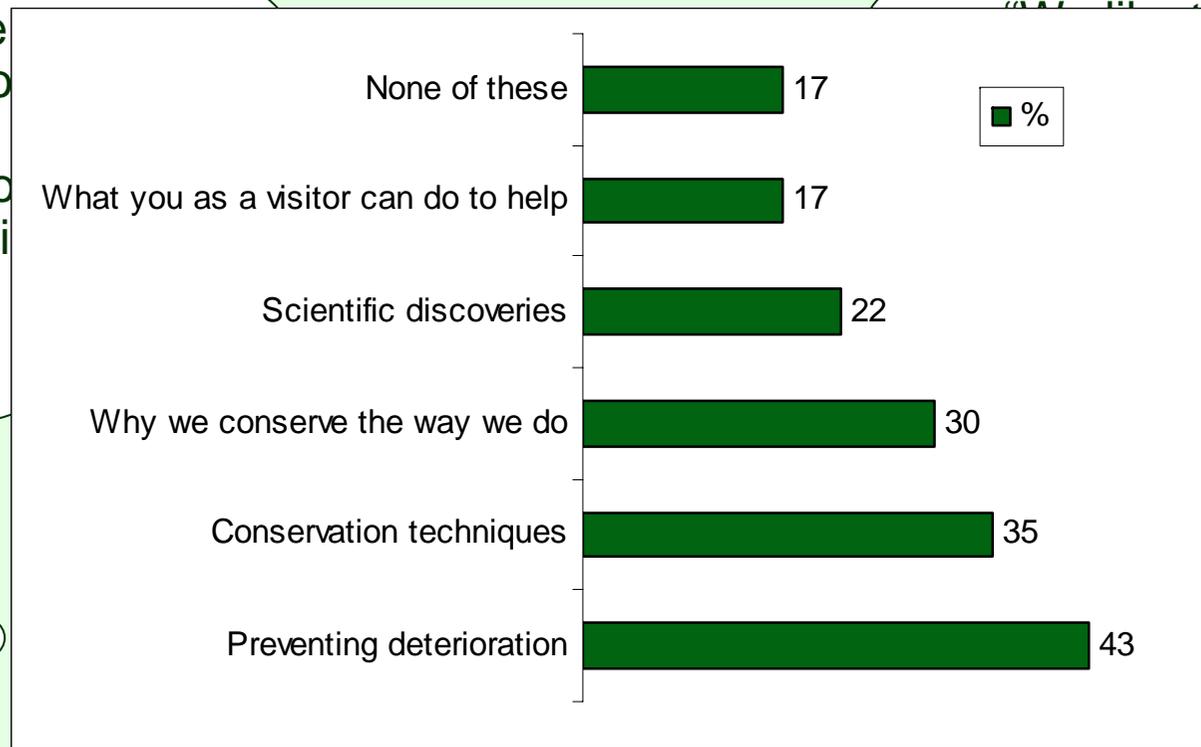
# Discussion

- Link between dustiness and evoked ‘atmosphere’ (in unsolicited comments)
- Relatively few comments overall relating to housekeeping
- Relatively few negative comments
- Variation between domestic and international visitors (market research data)

# Conclusion

- Interpreting conservation policy to engage and encourage visitor participation

“I don't agree leaving the rooms as they were. I would like to see them redone in all their splendour.”



state as a house”

was left.”

# Acknowledgements

- My co-authors
- National Trust house staff
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