

Factsheet

The Tudor Kitchens at Hampton Court Palace

- Henry VIII extended the kitchens at Hampton Court in 1529. Comprising fifty-five rooms, they covered 3,000 square feet, staffed by 200 people providing 600 meals a day twice a day for the Royal court.
- Located on the cooler, north side of the palace, the kitchens were accessed through a gatehouse, which was occupied by the Cofferer (kitchen accountant) and his assistants, the Clerks of the Greencloth, who monitored the arrival of all supplies and staff to the kitchens.
- The spicery was filled with exotic spices imported from the Orient and Europe, as well as English mustard and herbs grown in the palace's herb garden. The Office of Spicery was responsible for the huge quantities of fruit produced in the palace gardens, including apples and pears from two orchards.
- The Great Kitchen had six fireplaces with spit-racks, only one of which remains. Liveried serving men would collect the finished dishes from the serving hatches at the far end and take them to the Great Hall.
- In the confectionery delicate sweet dishes were prepared for the more important members of the Court.
- In the pastry house both sweet and savoury pies and pasties were prepared in four ovens.
- Meat stock and boiled meat were produced in the boiling house in a great boiling-copper which had a capacity of about 75 gallons.
- There were three larders in the Tudor kitchens: the flesh larder for meat, the wet larder for fish, and the dry larder for pulses and nuts. Meat was supplied from various sources including the palace's pheasant yard, rabbit warrens, and venison from the deer park. Fish (eaten on Fridays and during Lent) came from the palace's pond gardens.
- The palace had three cellars. The wine cellar, with attached drinking house for wine tasting, held 300 casks of wine for courtiers (wine and ale for the sovereign was kept in the privy cellar). Ale was stored in the great cellar –

an incredible 600,000 gallons of ale would have been drunk every year at court. This had two locks on the door and the keys were held by two different officials for extra security.

- When Elizabeth I lived at Hampton Court the kitchens physically did not change much, although lots had changed in the Tudor world, with greater exploration bringing exotic foods to the Royal table.
- A list from the reign of Elizabeth I reveals the quantity of meat cooked in the royal kitchens in one year; 1,240 oxen, 8,200 sheep, 2,330 deer, 760 calves, 1,870 pigs and a modest 53 wild boar.
- Upper class cookery in the Tudor period was very pan-European – the same high standard of ingredients and cookery was expected everywhere e.g. if olives were available in Italy, then the King of England would have served them in his court too. Regional favourites and styles existed, but many of the major dishes seem to be all based on a similar style. Emphasis was based on plenty of choice and freshness.
- Roasted meat graced almost every meal at the Royal Court as it was an expression of wealth for several reasons. Fresh meat all year was only available to the rich (most people would have eaten preserved meat); ordinary folk would have boiled meat whereas the rich could afford to roast it before a fire, a technique that wastes most of the fuel, plus you had to pay the ‘spit boy’ who sat all day turning the spit. It was truly a dish fit for a King!
- All the products that came from across the Atlantic took a long time to become popular. Potatoes, tomatoes, capsicum, peppers, maize and chocolate took sometime to appear in Tudor cookery. The exception to this rule seems to be the turkey that arrived in England very early in our Europe/American history.
- The word ‘pudding’ historically refers to a food that is contained in animal gut to hold it when cooking, like 'Black Pudding' or sausages. In the 17th Century, cooks realised that they could make puddings by containing food in cloth bags or bowls; this meant that more sweet puddings could be made than before. For example Quaking Pudding was a staple in recipe books throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th Centuries.