

File name: Cloister

Audio length: 1:41 minutes

Meg: So now we're in the cloister – and shout out to it because it is beautiful. But what's a cloister Pat?

Pat: The cloister was a place was for meditation and prayer and it's also where, for example, monks would write manuscripts. It was surrounded by covered walkways originally and you can actually still see the holes in the walls where the rafters went to support the roof. It linked the most important parts of the abbey, and you had to be silent in here, so the monks used sign language.

Meg: So this space is basically where the monks would go to get some peace and quiet away from Brother whatshisname who won't give it a flippin' rest.

Pat: Well yes they did come here to be quiet, but also in other parts of the abbey you had to be quiet too. So the parlour was really the only place you could talk.

Meg: And did all of the monks use this space? So the lay brothers and the choir monks?

Pat: They did, and they used this space for activities. For example, shaving and washing, and there are even some wash basins that were fed by piped water when monks washed their hands before meals – you can still see some of these wash basins in the wall today. They also had a ritual of washing their feet every Saturday afternoon.

Meg: And did they wash their own feet?

Pat: It was actually the Abbot that washed their feet, and this was supposed to reflect Christ washing the feet of his disciples.

Meg. Very good. And is there anything about the space you can point out that we should know about?

Pat: So lay brothers' lane would have come down to the back of the church from the cellarium, but the wall was taken out in the late 1400s. So it should be square, but isn't anymore. The lighter bricks at the top were added in 2005 from Bramley Falls quarry, and that's what the colour of the whole abbey would have been like originally. But like the rest of Leeds, the bricks have been stained black by industrial smoke from the city.